

P. o. angl.

18

m

Op. 0 angl.

78 m

-49

Asher



*Each Volume sold separately
at the rate of 15 groschen (½ Thal.) = 2 francs.*

ASHER'S COLLECTION
OF
ENGLISH AUTHORS
BRITISH AND AMERICAN.
COPYRIGHT EDITION.

VOL. 49.

KITTY BY MISS BETHAM-EDWARDS
IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. 2.

BERLIN
A. ASHER & CO. UNTER DEN LINDEN
1873.

PARIS: EMILE GALETTE, 12, RUE BONAPARTE.

*This Edition
is Copyright for Foreign Circulation only.*

243 F

ASHER'S COLLECTION OF ENGLISH AUTHORS.

All the volumes of Asher's Collection are published at the rate of 15 gr. ($\frac{1}{2}$ Thaler) = 2 francs each, with the sole exception of MIDDLEMARCH, by GEORGE ELIOT, published at 20 gr. ($\frac{2}{3}$ Thaler) = 2 fr. 50 c. per vol.

JUST PUBLISHED:

MIDDLEMARCH. By GEORGE ELIOT. Book 1 — MISS BROOKE.

——— Book 2 — OLD AND YOUNG.

——— Book 3 — WAITING FOR DEATH.

——— Book 4 — THREE LOVE PROBLEMS.

——— Book 5 — THE DEAD HAND.

——— Book 6 — THE WIDOW AND THE WIFE.

——— Book 7 — THE TWO TEMPTATIONS.

——— Book 8 — SUNSET AND SUNRISE.

SATANELLA. By WHYTE-MELVILLE. 1 vol.

OLD MARGARET. By HENRY KINGSLEY. 1 vol.

WILFRID CUMBERMEDE. By GEORGE MAC DONALD. 2 vol.

"This is a very beautiful book, which will delight Mr. Mac Donald's great circle of admirers." — *Spectator*.

GOOD-BYE SWEETHEART. By RHODA BROUGHTON. 2 vol.

"We are more impressed by this than by any of Miss Broughton's previous works. It is more carefully worked out, and conceived in a much higher spirit. Miss Broughton writes, or seems to write, from the very bottom of her heart. There is a terrible realism about her. The lady who can write 'Goodbye, Sweetheart', can afford to laugh at her critics." — *Echo*.

A LEAF IN THE STORM AND OTHER STORIES. By "OUIDA". 1 vol.

ROBERTAINSLEIGH. By M. E. BRADDON. 3 vol.

"We must not leave the volumes without giving Miss Braddon every credit, not merely for her ingenuity in weaving a plot but for her skill in conceiving characters in every instance suited to their age. . . . Miss Braddon has never produced a work of a more sterling character, or one which is more likely, we do not say to live for generations to come, but to firmly establish her name among those readers who care less for sensationalism than for sensibility." — *Standard*.

THE LAIRD OF NORLAW. By Mrs. OLIPHANT. 2 vol.

CLARA VAUGHAN. By R. D. BLACKMORE. 2 vol.

LORNA DOONE. By R. D. BLACKMORE. 2 vol.

"The reader at times holds his breath, so graphically yet so simply does John Ridd tell his tale. . . . 'Lorna Doone' is a work of real excellence, and as such we heartily commend it to the public." — *Saturday Review*.

THE HARVEYS. By HENRY KINGSLEY. 1 vol.

HOW IT ALL HAPPENED, AND OTHER STORIES. By Mrs. PARR, author of "Dorothy Fox". 2 vol.

"The author of 'Dorothy Fox' has solved the problem of being domestic without being tame. This is partly the result of her undoubted power of description and her insight into character, and partly of the kind of life which she describes — life mostly of the quiet rustic sort lurking in old country towns and old seaside villages which have not yet been crushed into uniformity by the march of 'progress'. It is a pleasant rest to the novel-reader after wading through dreary volumes recording the trivial lives of the worshippers of conventionality, or the conceptions of 'aristocratic' life, formed by some vulgar panderer to the bad taste of the middle classes, to turn to such an old-world village as Ursley or Chad's End, and hear the simple annals of its quaint inhabitants." — *Athenaeum*.

THOMASINA. A Biography. By the author of "Dorothy", "De Cressy", "Still Waters" etc. 1 vol.

"This is undeniably a pleasing story." — *Pall Mall Gazette*.

KITTY

ASHER'S COLLECTION

OF

ENGLISH AUTHORS

M. BETHAM-EDWARDS

BRITISH AND AMERICAN.

COPYRIGHT EDITION.

VOL. 49.

KITTY BY M. BETHAM-EDWARDS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

Bayerische
Staatsbibliothek
München

ASHER'S COLLECTION
OF
ENGLISH AUTHORS
BRITISH AND AMERICAN

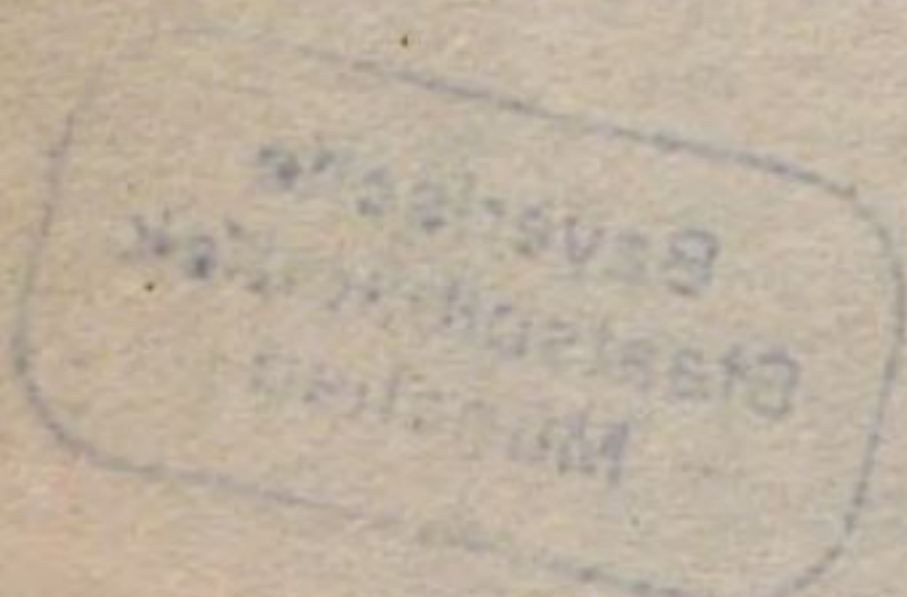
COPYRIGHT EDITION

VOL. II.

EDITED BY M. BETHAM-EDWARDS

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.



KITTY

BY

M. BETHAM-EDWARDS,

AUTHOR OF "DOCTOR JACOB," "THE SYLVESTRES," ETC. ETC.

COPYRIGHT EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES,

VOL. II.

BERLIN

A. ASHER & CO. UNTER DEN LINDEN.

1872.

The Right of Translation is reserved.



K

BY

M. BETHAM-EDWARDS,

AUTHOR OF "HISTORY OF THE STATUTES," ETC.

COPYRIGHT EDITION

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

BERLIN

A. ASHER & CO. LONDON AND LINDEN

1872

The Right of Translation is reserved.

CONTENTS

THE SECOND VOLUME

BOOK II.

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXXIV. THE WAITING OF THE DAY	1
XXXV. CAUGHT	10
XXXVI. KITTY AND HER PROTECTOR	19
XXXVII. A MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE	27
XXXVIII. PERRY'S PILGRIMAGE	34
XXXIX. PERRY'S PILGRIMAGE (continued)	45
XL. HOW MR. GEORGE TALKED ON HIS TRIP	49
XLI. WHAT MR. NORMAN SAID ON KITTY'S BE- HALF	59
XLII. WHAT MRS. CROFTON SAID ON KITTY'S BEHALF	63
XLIII. KITTY TAKES COUNSEL OF HERSELF	74
XLIV. WHAT KITTY SAID ON HER OWN BEHALF	83
XLV. ANCHORED	93
XLVI. THE JOURNEY SOUTH	101
XLVII. "THAT COMPOUNDED FRENCHMAN"	110

BOOK II.

CONTENTS

OF

THE SECOND VOLUME.

CHAPTER.	PAGE.
XXXIV. THE WATERS OF OBLIVION	I
XXXV. CAUGHT IN A NET	10
XXXVI. KITTY AND HER PROTÉGÉ	19
XXXVII. A MISTERIOUS MISSION	27
XXXVIII. PERRY'S PILGRIMAGE	34
XXXIX. PERRY'S PILGRIMAGE (<i>continued</i>)	42
XL. HOW SIR GEORGE FARED ON HIS ERRAND	49
XLI. WHAT DR NORMAN SAID ON KITTY'S BE- HALF	56
XLII. WHAT MRS CORNFORD SAID ON KITTY'S BEHALF	63
XLIII. KITTY TAKES COUNSEL OF HERSELF	74
XLIV. WHAT KITTY SAID ON HER OWN BEHALF	83
XLV. ANCHORED	92
XLVI. THE JOURNEY SOUTH	101
XLVII. "THAT CONFOUNDED FRENCHMAN!"	110

CHAPTER.	PAGE.
XLVIII. GOOD NEWS	118
XLIX. AMATEUR CHIROMANCY	126
L. THE SWEETS OF LOVE	134
LI. THE BITTERNESS OF FRIENDSHIP	142
LII. HOW KITTY PLEADED FOR HER LOVER	150
LIII. THE LULL AFTER THE STORM	158
LIV. DR NORMAN SEEKS CONSOLATION	165
LV. POLLY CORNFORD PREACHES A SERMON	174
LVI. PERRY'S WANDERINGS CONTINUED	182
LVII. SUCCESSFUL DIPLOMACY	190
LVIII. ECONOMY <i>versus</i> LOVE	198
LIX. "THIS, MY SON, WAS LOST, AND IS FOUND"	206
LX. TIDINGS OF KITTY	215
LXI. "FROGGY WOULD A-WOOING GO"	223
LXII. LAURA'S SATURDAYS	231
LXIII. "A DREADFUL DOOR IN HER SOUL STOOD WIDE"	241
LXIV. THE BELGRAVIAN WEDDING	249
LXV. THE BOHEMIAN WEDDING	257
LXVI. HUSBAND AND WIFE	266
LXVII. LADY BARTELOTTE IS INTRODUCED	275
LXVIII. MRS PERUGINO "AT HOME"	282
LXIX. PERRY UNDER DOMESTICATION	290
LXX. THE RETURN HOME	298
LXXI. MORE OLD FRIENDS	306
LXXII. KITTY'S LAST APPEARANCE IN BOHEMIA	315
LXXIII. CONCLUSION	324

KITTY.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE WATERS OF OBLIVION.

ARCACHON is the quaintest place in the world, with a little village of lodging-houses, built like pagodas, forests of little pine-trees, little walks and drives about a little lake, and a climate of such soporific quality as to produce a kind of mental torpor upon all tourists who go there. So soporific, indeed, is the pine-scented air, that one would be inclined to think an assassin might forget the murder on his conscience, a philanthropist his schemes, an author his critics, whilst breathing it. And Kitty Silver indeed forgot the friends and lovers to whom she was bound.

She was enjoying a sense of freedom as new as it was delightful. Sir George and Ella treated her as if she were a duchess. It was always, "Would Miss Silver like this? Would Miss Silver object to that? Did Miss Silver wish to visit such and such

a place?" Every arrangement seemed made with regard to her pleasure, and, beyond a little care of Ella, she was absolutely free from any responsibility whatever. All this kindness, this hospitality, this consideration, came spontaneously and unsought. She sat down to rich feasts, mental as well as material, every day, with the assurance of being a welcome and honoured guest, and she had never before found herself under precisely the same circumstances.

Had she not purchased all the pleasant things of Shelley House with the coin of innumerable daily services? Had she not richly paid Myra for all the good things of her giving—acting by turns as housekeeper, secretary, butler, milliner? How often had she gone to bed sick and weary with the efforts of the day, commiserating herself and envying every one else in the world?

Her life was easy beyond her imagination. She had nothing to do but to enjoy herself all day long, and she flourished on such liberal diet, looking so handsome in her pretty country costume, that it was a pleasure to behold her.

She never seemed to remember that she was handsome, which made people more ready to praise her good looks. And, in fact, so busy was she with all sorts of plans and problems, that she had very little time to think about her personal appearance.

"How beautiful you are!" Ella was always

saying. "How handsome and clever that girl is, by Jove!" was Sir George always thinking; and between the two Kitty got as much praise as was good for her. Praise is, no doubt, a great personal beautifier, so long as it is kept within legitimate bounds, just as continuous undeserved blame makes people grow cross and ugly. Kitty could hardly help smiling and looking bright when she saw her smiles and bright looks reflected in other faces; and her new friends were most appreciative. They appreciated Kitty for her real self, finding her fresh way of looking at things in general especially refreshing to persons like themselves, whose experiences were limited to one phase of society. Kitty forgot sometimes that she was no longer the Kitty of Paradise Place, and would impulsively give way to piquant little witticisms that were hardly refined. She would blush a delicious rose-colour when the deed was done, and say very meekly—

"What have I said?—but that comes of living among authors and artists, you know. One can't help imbibing slang."

Her Protean idiosyncrasy came out astoundingly. Sir George was a bibliomaniac; and what, in Heaven's name, could Kitty know about old books? But Kitty was not one of those who "eyes have they and see not, ears have they and hear not." She had lived in Bohemia, and Bohemia boasts of its bibliomaniacs too. She remembered how upon one occasion—it was in her childhood—there

had been a struggle of many days between the universal bibliomania and—starvation. Perry's father possessed a rare black-letter Bible, which he adored almost beyond his little curly-headed lad of nine years; but the little curly-headed lad was in rags, and poor Polly Cornford had to bury her husband, and Kitty herself, a wild-eyed gipsy of nine years, too, was lying sick with measles, and duns were at the door.

Poor old Perugino held out till the entreaties and reproaches of the women—not Polly Cornford, mind you—were too much for him, then, very meekly and sadly, carried off his beloved black-letter, and brought home forty pounds in exchange; and Mr Cornford was buried, and poor little Perry was fed and clothed, and Kitty was provided with wine, and every one rejoiced, except old Perugino.

Kitty remembered this, and racked her brains for other half-forgotten facts about books, in order that Sir George might find her conversant with his hobby. She told him of such and such a place in Paris, and such and such a place in London, where he would not fail to discover treasures; and discussed booksellers, editions, bindings, catalogues, till Sir George was in a seventh heaven, and thought Ella's friend by far the most superior-minded young lady of their acquaintance.

"It is so good of you to interest yourself about papa's book mania," Ella would say. "You know it bores bother people dreadfully, especially young

people. I cannot think how it is that nothing in the world seems to bore you."

"Could I find anything to bore me here, I should be a captious wretch, not fit to live," Kitty answered, demurely.

"But tell me honestly, dear—do you like old books?"

"I do, indeed. You know, my childhood was spent among scholarly people, and I am interested in everything they liked."

"How fortunate for papa—and for me!" Ella said, smiling archly, "for, with the best intentions in the world, we are dull company for each other sometimes,"—she added, with a sigh. "I often think papa must be an angel to bear being tied to a fretful invalid as he does. He is unpopular, generally speaking, and many domestic matters have helped to sour his temper; but you see how good and kind and unselfish he is at home."

"Quite an angel," Kitty said, smiling; "only angels haven't black beards."

Ella laughed, and said that her father's beard was the only personal vanity he had; adding—

"Papa detests a handsome man as much as he admires a handsome woman. Those amusing men at Fontainebleau were not handsome, or he would never have tolerated them."

And they talked away merrily, as was their wont to do, never finding the pine woods, or the pagodas,

or the little lake monotonous, and growing more intimate every day.

It was a happy, oblivious time, and Kitty wished that it might last for ever. The sword of Damocles, in the shape of Dr Norman's letter, was always hanging over her, but she persisted in not seeing it. She would not recognise the evil hour till it had come.

When she first arrived at Arcachon there remained exactly twenty-one days' respite, and twenty-one days pass quickly under pleasant circumstances. From the dewy, pine-scented, bird-singing morning, till the luminous, tranquil, southern night, there was nothing to do at Arcachon but to enjoy existence. They had drives, they lounged over novels under the orange trees, they made delightfully easy little excursions, they were idle to the pitch of idiocy; and how delicious such idleness was! What indeed is so delicious as idleness in a foreign land with plenty of sunshine?

Kitty's twenty-one days passed like a dream, out of which she awoke one morning to find herself utterly dismayed. She had counted the time that must elapse between the sending of her letter and the arrival of it, and she knew that she must write to Dr Norman within the next four-and-twenty hours. The early half of the time was not insupportable. It is so easy to forget at mid-day that one has to swallow an unpleasant potion at midnight; and Kitty drove out with Ella, sauntered about the

garden with Sir George, enjoyed her noontide siesta, and dined as usual. But all these things came to an end, and she found herself at last shut up in her own room, pen in hand—Dr Norman's letter lying before her, and her mind full of irresolution, penitence, and dismay. She sat down, and calmly reviewed the state of her affairs, moral and material.

One point was clear—she stood bound to Dr Norman; and another was equally so—her friendship for Dr Norman was the only safe investment she had hitherto made. Myra loved her; but Myra was ready to marry any day without considering her friend's welfare. Ella loved her; but Ella was not an easy person to know intimately; and beyond a delightful acquaintance, what was Ella to her? If Myra forsook her, if no one else took her up, should she not be fairly worsted in the battle of life?

It seemed to Kitty that duty and expediency ran here in parallel lines, and that if the former stood Dr Norman in good stead, so much more did the latter. Compassion also inclined her to him. Some persons in Kitty's condition would have lost sight of all but Dr Norman's salient grievances; but she had a mental visage of extraordinary clearness, and here, far away at Arcachon, could see how every detail of his good, earnest life would be influenced by her decision.

All the softness and ease and elegance of the existence she had been leading of late, all the in-

fluence of Ella's refined nature, inclined her more kindly towards Dr Norman now. All the outlying troubles, that seemed gathering like a snowball, inclined her more kindly towards him. She never wanted less to go back to the hum-drum country life that she knew would be her portion as his wife; but Ella was making her good, and she dreaded to do a wantonly wicked, unwomanly thing.

The clock of the little church struck eleven, twelve, one, and Kitty knew no more what the purport of her letter was to be than she had done in the morning. She dipped her pen in the ink, and, having dated the letter, began desperately—

“My dear Dr Norman.”

But as soon as that was done, she rose in desperate indecision, and walked up and down the room, sighing to herself. Perhaps, had she felt morally certain that if she broke off with Dr Norman then and there, she should be no more reminded of him, and no more brought into contact with anybody belonging to him, she could have sat down at once and ended the misery.

“If only some one, if only something would help me,” she said to herself as she turned about the paper, unwilling to write the death-warrant of her best friend's happiness. Once she stopped, and wrote the following sentence to see how the truth looked on paper. “Oh! forgive me. I must be false to you. Forget the wretch that I am!” But no sooner were the words written than she held

the paper to the candle, and destroyed the horrid symbols that they were. She cared for Dr Norman's good opinions, for her own self-respect, too much to prove herself a liar; but then the cost of being true!—to go back to the hum-drum village life; to take upon herself the charge of those wilful children; to respond to Dr Norman's noble, honest, large-hearted life and love—could she do all these at all, much less do them well?

And then there was Perry!

She threw herself on the bed in a paganish impatience with the Fates that had brought her into such straits, craving in her poor blind humanity a Deity to pray to, or a second self to give help and counsel.

As Kitty lay thus, wondering if this were the kind of ordeal to make people become pinched, and old, and ugly, she glided from the stupor of despondency into the stupor of sleep.

During that state of imperfect slumber she dreamed, or thought she dreamed, that she was drowsing on the old sofa in Paradise Place, sitting up to let in Perry and Mrs Cornford, who had gone to the theatre. Kitty and Mrs Cornford used to take it by turns to go with him, when the ticket of admission was only a double one, and it was Perry's custom to signify their return by throwing a pebble against the casement, or singing a snatch of a song. How real Kitty's dream seemed to be! There was Perry outside singing—

"Oh! had I a thousand a year, Gaffer Green:" and then there came the impatient shower of gravel against the panes.

"Oh! wait a minute," she cried, starting up impatiently; but the action roused her, and she laid her head on the pillow almost wishing that the dream were true. And it was true, in a sense, for the singing and the shower did not cease, though Kitty remained wakeful; and when she rose from her bed to peer out, there was a wild Quixotic figure, Perry's self, keeping watch beneath the window!

CHAPTER XXXV.

CAUGHT IN A NET.

THERE was no time for thinking. He had found her out. She must accord him an interview at any risk. Foolish, fond, never-to-be-forgiven Perry!

By a great effort she controlled the passion of terror and indignation that had taken possession of her, and opening the window, said, all in a breath—

"You must be mad to think we can recognise each other here. Am I not a lady? have I not a reputation? do you want me to hate you, that you persecute me thus? But I will meet you at Bordeaux to-morrow, and hear all that you have to say, if you promise me three things."

"A hundred, if you like," came up Perry's answer from the garden. "See you, I must and will."

"You will promise never to come near this house again?"

"Well?"

"You will promise to enter into no communication, either by interview or by writing, with Sir George or Miss Bartelotte?"

"Good. And now for request number three?"

"You will promise to behave like a rational being to-morrow, and not refer at all to the engagement that once existed between us?"

"Kitty," cried Perry, with mock solemnity, "what you ask of me is nothing in comparison to the sacrifices I am ready to make for you. Throw me down the Testament, or the Koran, or the Talmud, and I will swear to obey to the letter."

"I will trust your word," Kitty said; "and I will meet you at the Hôtel de la Paix to-morrow, exactly at eleven o'clock. Good night."

"One word," pleaded Perry, with pathetic passion in his voice; but Kitty shut the window and fastened the shutters resolutely. When she felt once more alone, she could have cried with mortification and dismay; all her feelings of compassion for Dr Norman had died out, and she sat down to write to him in a mood that was half retributive and half revengeful. What right had Dr Norman—what right had Perry to make her so suffer? Was she not free to choose her own life, and select from

all the affections held out to her the one she found sweetest and best? Why was she to be hunted down just because she happened to be brighter, wittier, more attractive than most other women; and goaded, netted, entangled, like any helpless dumb animal? Poor Kitty, it must be confessed, had no idea of any higher duty than inclination. Inclination was her religion, her law, her judge; and inclination no longer pleaded in behalf of Dr Norman.

Perry's unexpected appearance had caused a reaction, but not a reaction favourable to her absent lover. In plain English, Kitty's sentimentalism went flying to the four winds, and a fit of genuine ill-temper took its place. She was eminently an amiable person when worldly things went tolerably well with her; and she looked upon fits of ill humour much as other people look upon fits of intemperance, kleptomania, or any other vice. She hated it, and yet could not fight it off.

So, visiting Perry's sins upon Dr Norman's head, she sat down to write to him in a state of mind which could but argue ill both for the manner and matter of her letter. What she wrote, she could not precisely remember afterwards; she only knew that her meaning was worded as plainly as could be, and that it was the utter defeat of Dr Norman's hopes. For once in her life she had written nothing but the naked, unvarnished truth; how he would receive it was an after and secondary

thought. Then she sealed her letter savagely, and creeping downstairs, placed it beside the letter-bag, already locked in readiness for the early post.

Kitty had a power of voluntary forgetfulness, which is most enviable in these feverish, overworked times. She could force herself to sentence one lover to a humiliating disappointment, and to make a dangerous assignation with another, without keeping awake after it. Her mind was not yet made up as to the safest means of carrying her plan into effect; but she knew that to begin to think was to go on thinking, so she shut up the faculties of her mind, as one shuts up trinkets in a drawer, and slept soundly till dawn.

Over the process of dressing she determined upon the wisest conduct to pursue: she would feign to receive a letter from some old friend passing through Bordeaux, or, if the letter-bag were opened before Sir George or Ella, and there were no letters for her at all, she would feign to have received some such letter a day or two since. To coax Sir George into keeping Ella company, to coax both into faith in her story, would not, she thought, be difficult. As luck would have it, a letter did come to her from Bordeaux that day—a tradesman's letter merely—relating to some purchases she had made for Myra; but who was to know that? She let her tête-à-tête breakfast with Sir George draw to an end, and just as he began to talk of the day's plans, said—

"I am most annoyingly obliged to take the half-past nine o'clock train to Bordeaux this morning; if you will stay with Ella, perhaps she will not mind."

"I have a great mind to go with you," Sir George said. "I want to see what the booksellers have there."

Kitty looked up with a sweet, deprecating smile.

"Much as I should like your escort, I will not accept it," she answered. "Without you, without me, for a livelong day, what would darling Ella do?"

"You are right—as you always are. People may come, and she may not be feeling well, or a dozen things may happen. And now I think of it, I asked Colonel Johnson and his fellow-traveller to drop in to lunch. Must you go to-day?"

"I am afraid so."

"Some important shopping on hand?" said Sir George, quizzically. He was profoundly inquisitive.

"No. I go to meet a friend there who is passing through Bourdeaux on his way—to Spain, I presume," Kitty answered, hypothetically; adding with a smile, "he is a poor young artist—a protégé of mine, I might say (oh! happy Kitty, to have hit upon that innocent word), and if I refuse to go and see him, he would feel greatly hurt."

"Ask him to come here."

"You are very good!" Kitty said; "but he might want to come again, and that would be troublesome; whereas, if I go to Bordeaux with Françoise, and have half-an-hour's talk with him, the matter will be ended for once and for all."

Sir George acquiesced, and, with a very faint show of wellbred surprise, Ella acquiesced also. Neither of them liked the idea of losing Kitty—the sun of their universe—for a whole day, and there was a little feeling of jealousy underlying the regret. Who was this all-important protégé, for whom she gave up a luncheon-party as rigidly as if she were a lawyer bound to Bordeaux to make the will of a dying person. It seemed incredible that a poor wandering art-student—a mere boy, as they gleaned from Kitty's reports—should exact such excessive considerations of punctuality from her. Could he not have waited? Could he not have come?

Whilst Kitty was making out her case, Sir George and Ella saw matters in the light that she wished them to do; so subtly could she force the reasoning powers of another into a focus of any compass she liked. She had said with the utmost simplicity, "I must go to Bordeaux to see a poor young artist, a protégé of mine, and I must go to-day," and there seemed no possible objection to make to either statement. But no sooner were her personal persuasions withdrawn, than their faculties gradually sharpened, and they perceived that the circumstance

was pregnant with suggestion, and—they could not conceal the thought from each other—suspicion also.

“Our dear Kitty is so generous, and so full of sympathy and affection, that I could never be quite sure into what imprudence she might not be led,” said Ella; “and Mrs Wingfield used to talk of her lovers as if they were legion.”

“Of course, of course,” said Sir George, a little testily, feeling envious just then of younger men in general, and of Kitty’s lovers in particular. “A woman like Miss Silver has lovers whether she is rich or poor—the daughter of a peer or of a sweep. What a figure she has! and what wit! She is superb!”

“Don’t fall in love with Kitty yourself, papa,” Ella added, joking; “for generous as she is, and sweet and loving as she is, she cannot marry all her lovers”—adding archly, “and I don’t want a step-mamma—though I adore Kitty.”

Sir George seemed somewhat shocked at Ella’s levity.

“My dear,” he said, “you forget that you and I have not a shilling to spare, and that I wouldn’t spoil your comfort if Miss Silver had a million . . . and I were as much in love with her . . . as Tyrrell is in love with you.”

Ella laughed sarcastically.

“I hope your passion would be to better purpose, though I doubt it,” she said. “I believe Kitty

might be led into follies and complications by exaggerated notions of kindness, but she is as far from falling in love as I am—and that is saying a great deal.”

“You will never marry, Ella?”

“Papa, how preposterous is the very idea! And that brings us back to Kitty. A woman who renounces marriage, as I do, must seek for compensation in friendship. I cannot tell you what it would be to me now to lose the friend I have found in Kitty Silver.”

“There is no present danger of that kind that I see,” Sir George said. “Miss Kitty Silver likes us, and likes our ways. She will not go yet.”

“We have no kind of claim upon her time, remember, papa,” Ella said; “but it is not the idea of losing Kitty for the present that makes me uneasy. It is the future I am thinking of. Supposing Kitty holds herself free to accept a home with us instead of returning to Mrs Wingfield—of course, I do not know how matters stand with them, and speak hypothetically—would you offer any objection to such an arrangement?”

Sir George looked like a man who is suddenly asked to lend his dearest friend a large sum of money.

“She is a poor clergyman’s daughter, or something of that sort, isn’t she? and has been a governess. We should have to pay her at least a hundred a year.”

"Poor papa!" cried Ella, laughing heartily at this display of her father's little weakness; "poor, victimised papa! it is too bad to come down upon you with such expensive whims; but if Kitty is to be had at any price, I must have her—always supposing Kitty to be all and no more than we take her to be."

"There is just a dash of artistic Bohemia about her," said Sir George, "that makes me feel a little uncertain whether 'Love me, love my friends,' would apply in her case;" and then he stopped short, and looked at Ella earnestly.

"Exactly," answered Ella; "but how are we ever to obtain certainty? Mrs Wingfield is the only friend of Kitty's we know, and she is a gentlewoman, though sadly destitute of brains and education. We couldn't go to her for 'references' of her most intimate friend?"

"Will it not be better to leave matters as they are for the present?" asked her father, unwilling to spend an extra hundred a year, even to secure the society of a young, handsome, and gifted woman.

And for the present the matter was allowed to rest.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

KITTY AND HER PROTÉGÉ.

No [s]ooner did Kitty find herself alone with Françoise, on her way to Bordeaux, than a delicious, vagabondish sense of freedom took possession of her. It was a long time now since she had experienced the feeling, and though she was a slave of her own free will, and the chains that bound her were covered with velvet and down, they galled a little at times. To-day she cast them off, and felt glad.

Perry might prove intractable, their interview might be bitter, the consequences of it might be unpleasant to herself; but she gave herself up to the hour with the joy of a released bird. "What a bright day it is!" she thought, as the train sped on; "how blue the sky looks: how sweet the air smells! I wonder why it is that I notice these things so seldom now?"

How should she have time to notice them, when occupied from morning till night with the task of pleasing others?

"I am young," meditated Kitty; "I have faculty enough for a dozen people; I could slip into almost any little groove and enjoy existence, provided I had one thing—money. But, as it is, I must let trifles go, however pleasant; I am like a person on a long journey, who cannot stop to

pick up flowers or chase butterflies, though I long to do it."

Then, giving utterance to her thoughts, she said, "Francine, my child, are you happy?"

The girl opened her round blue eyes in surprise.

"Very happy, when mademoiselle is satisfied with me," she said.

"But have you nothing in life to make you happier than that—no sweetheart?"

"Not yet, mademoiselle," answered Francine, blushing. "I have a good mistress, no cares for the morrow, and holidays on saints' days. I am quite contented."

"You poor little thing!" Kitty said, in a tone of magnificent compassion. She could not help pitying Francine for having a contented mind. To her, to live meant to desire, and to desire meant to obtain. After a little while she took a Napoleon out of her purse, rather abruptly, and said, holding it up before the girl's eyes—

"Francine, if you see anything or hear anything to-day that you feel sure I should not wish talked of, you are to hold your peace. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Then, here is your Napoleon. But if you are imprudent, if you tattle, if you allow other people to bother you into talking about me and my affairs,

I should send you back to your home forthwith, though I like my little maid so much," she added, with a subtle show of mixed severity and affection.

Françine took her Napoleon, cried a little out of gratitude at being trusted, and then retired into a corner, like a submissive dog, who knows that for the present he is not wanted. Kitty was silent till the train arrived at Bordeaux, and stepped out on to the platform, calm, though flushed.

She drew her veil over her face, saw at a glance that Perry was not there; then, beckoning a coachman, ordered him to drive her to the Hôtel de la Paix.

There are some things in which one never grows older, and Kitty, who grew, morally speaking, months every day, was as young as ever in this, that she could not meet Perry unmoved.

Other people were almost impersonal to her. Dr Norman was a sad and lamentable circumstance in her life; Myra had been a fortunate circumstance; Sir George and Ella were delightful circumstances; Perry only seemed a really existent person—flesh and spirit; and she could no more forget him than she could forget herself.

She wished him to keep out of sight; she would fain have forgotten him; she could be outwardly cruel to him—but he exercised the same spell over her that she exercised over other people, only in a different degree.

On this occasion her heart was beating fast

all the time that she greeted him with apparent indifference; he did not see it, he did not divine it, but under that calm, beautifully-poised manner, burned a volcanic fire of conflicting passions.

They shook hands and talked of the weather till they were fairly installed in a little salon where Perry had provided a pretty breakfast, adorned with flowers, for Perry never forgot to fête Kitty under any circumstances. Then Kitty let Francine take off her soft summer cloak of creamy white, and her modest straw bonnet with its one little rosebud, and motioning the young girl to a seat by the window, sat down at the head of Perry's table.

"What are we to have?" she said, with an affectation of the old childish gourmandise that Perry had delighted to indulge; "little fish, little birds? and, oh, there is some *nougât*! Give me a bit, this minute, please."

Perry chipped off a bit of the *nougât*, delighted, and Kitty crushed it with her strong, beautiful little teeth, and asked for more. She had overcome her agitation now, and determined to be good and kind to her poor faithful protégé, and make him happy for an hour, if she could.

"And now, tell me," she said, "(my little maid understands no English), from whence you came, and where you are going to? How is dear Polly and her chicks? What is she doing? And is

Vittoria married? I want to hear everything about everybody."

Perry began his catechism at the end. Vittoria was married; Polly Cornford and her chicks had gone home; her stay in Paris had turned out well, he thought, and so on.

"And what are you going to do with yourself this winter, dear Perry?" asked Kitty.

Perry was clumsily carving a little bird.

"I will tell you when I have achieved this performance," he said; and as soon as a delicate bit was finally conveyed to Kitty's plate, added—

"I am going to Madrid to see the pictures of Velasquez, and from Madrid to Cadiz, and from Cadiz to Tunis, and perhaps on to Algiers. Algiers is a fine place for artists, some of our fellows say. If I like it, I shall stay and paint there."

Perry said all this as circumspectly as if the plan had been digested for months, whereas it had only come into his mind during the last few minutes. Finding Kitty miles farther from him than before, reading in her very friendliness and ease a sign that all question of love was over between them, he felt bound to go somewhere, and do something, just because so much was expected of him.

"What a delightful journey!" Kitty cried, enthusiastically, though in her inmost heart she felt offended at Perry's sudden show of independence. "The change will be good for your health, too."

"And where will you be meanwhile?" Perry asked, very sullenly.

"It is quite uncertain as yet."

"Don't marry that miserly old beggar, Sir George Bartelotte," Perry added.

Kitty crimsoned.

"O Perry! Sir George Bartelotte would no more dream of marrying me than I should dream of"—

"Marrying me?"

"If you finish my sentences for me, you must do it after your own fashion," Kitty said, laughing; "but you shouldn't ask a lady to a pretty breakfast and then get out of temper with her, Perry; it is not good manners. You are going such a long way off, too, Heaven knows when we shall see each other again! Do let us be friends."

Poor Perry battled hard with the pent-up passion of months, but for the life of him he could not conquer it and be pleasant. Kitty coaxed and caressed him with all sorts of kind looks and subtle words, turned over his sketches one by one in her old careful, critical way, made him present her with the prettiest, gave a trinket off her watch-chain in exchange, said he might write to her; in fine, patronised him in a way that would have been delicious to any very young man—except a rejected lover.

Kitty was hardly more happy than Perry all this time; but how was Perry to know it? She laughed, smiled, talked without any apparent effort; she

addressed him as her "foolish boy," her "sad vagabond," her "poor, helpless Perry," as coolly and composedly as if she had been his mother. Perry could not perceive the tumult raging in her heart of hearts, and she felt a secret contempt for him because of his blindness.

Thus they went on misunderstanding each other more and more.

Oh! alike in love or hate, how blind are we! Heart beats close to heart—as it seems—and by great, unspeakable, painful efforts, we try to bring ourselves in closest sympathy with our friend; or the truth is so simple that we think he must find it out; and it escapes him. We remain mysteries to each other, in spite of ourselves, till both go down to the grave. How often do our words, acts, and looks falsify us, when our souls are true as steel? Is it a cruel game of fate?—is it a necessary condition of human imperfection? We know nothing, and can only wait.

Perry did not know that this was a fateful moment for him; that now, if ever, Kitty might have listened and given way, had he made a show of mastery. That violent fit of ill humour of the night before was reacting in his favour now; the glimpse of utter freedom she was enjoying with him, the sunshine, the little feast, the unconcern, the tone of their meeting, recalling, as it did, unregretted, but nevertheless happy days, were all in his favour. His following her was in his favour. Why was he

gloomy, sullen, vindictive, just when a little strength and a little sweetness might have stood him in such good stead? Poor Perry had changed within the last few months. Disappointment, absinthe, evil company, had done their work well; he seemed fast accomplishing the ruin upon which he had determined.

The old joyous habit of admiration even seemed wholly gone. If he praised Kitty's dress or looks, it was in a savagely jealous manner; and when she said do this or that, he obeyed apathetically and slavishly, more like a beaten dog than a lover.

So the hours wore on; and Kitty and Perry, as children who have started for a summer walk holding hands across a tiny brooklet, found the brooklet grow into a brook, and the brook into a rivulet, and the rivulet into a river, broad and deep. They spoke to each other, but their voices had a strange and hollow sound. They could not go back to the point from whence they had started, and the river grew wider and wider. The sky was bright overhead, the earth was bright around; but life seemed cold, and dark, and old to these two, as they lost sight of each other's faces and went their ways.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A MYSTERIOUS MISSION.

THERE is a Spanish proverb which says, "Every hair has its shadow," but the maker of the proverb should have added, by way of moral, "Happy is he who sees it not."

The possessor of superabundant tact can scarcely be a happy person, and Kitty was such a person. She saw the shadow of every hair.

For instance, no sooner had she received Ella's kiss of welcome and Sir George's hand-shake—both were apparently as cordial as ever—than she knew that something was going wrong. Just a touch of apprehension, just a shade of mistrust, just an approximation of jealousy were evident to her, which would not have been evident to one person out of fifty thousand. Whilst she was making of her day at Bordeaux as pretty an idyll as could be; whilst Ella listened, smiled, and asked none but answerable questions, for Ella had plenty of tact too; whilst Sir George talked naturally of Perry's projected tour and the advantages likely to accrue from it, Kitty saw as clearly as ordinary people see that black is black and white is white, what mischief Perry had worked her. The harm was done, past cure. She must make the best of it.

She worked harder than ever for the next few days. She posed as an angel, and did it to per-

fection. Sir George could almost have forgiven ugliness in a woman who was so amiable, so lively, so capable as she. Kitty managed the house now, even marketed at times, and this economical proceeding enchanted Sir George beyond anything. Kitty suggested that the courier was unnecessary—a master-stroke! The courier was dismissed, and Kitty had reached the pinnacle of Sir George's favour. If possible, she devoted herself more to Ella than ever. Ella concluded a dozen times a day that she could not possibly live without Kitty, but she wished Kitty had no protégés, and hesitated before making her one of themselves.

But Ella had an attack of illness, and this brought matters to a crisis. Kitty sat up with her for several successive nights; but for Kitty's care, the doctor said, Ella might have succumbed. It was Kitty only who could soothe her to sleep, Kitty who could devise a comfortable pillow, Kitty who could think of something for her to eat. Sir George's gratitude was rapturous, and as soon as Ella became convalescent, revived her plan regarding Kitty's future.

"It is not a question of choice, it is a question of necessity," he said. "Kitty must come to us. She is just the sort of person we want; we are just the people she wants. It really seems a dispensation of Providence—but I don't think, my dear, we need say anything about salary. What a home it is for her!"

"Papa!" cried Ella, quite shocked; "I am so fond of Kitty that I hate giving her money at all. But two hundred pounds a year would be too little for any gentlewoman, under the circumstances"—

Sir George looked very nervous and uncomfortable.

"I don't want to be shabby, Ella; she is a splendid girl, good as gold, and sharp as a Jew. She will save you the expense of a lady's-maid, and work all sorts of reformatations among our extravagant pack of servants into the bargain. But"—

"Indeed, you misunderstand me, papa," Ella answered, colouring painfully. "I want Kitty to be my friend, not my servant. I cannot and will not trade upon her goodness to me."

"But, my dear child, she declares that nothing makes her so happy as doing things for people she likes. Why not let her be happy in her own way?" Sir George chuckled to himself, and added, "and save our pockets when we can?"

"Papa, you would not take that tone if you knew how I dislike it," Ella said; "we are not deciding a question of money. We are thinking of Kitty's happiness and our own."

Sir George was terribly afraid of Ella's anger, and said, very penitently—

"I can't help thinking of money, how can I, when every acre I have goes to a man I hate, and your whole portion must be saved out of my

income? I should not be stingy if it were not for this."

Ella laid one of her fragile little hands on his arm.

"Poor, dear papa!" she said, "I am always forgetting the future. I suppose it is because I fancy I shall not live very long to want money at all."

"To return to Miss Silver," began Sir George, abruptly,—he could not bear to dwell for a moment on the probability of Ella's life being short,—“she is to live with us if she likes; that is understood, is it not?”

"On one or two conditions," Ella answered, brightly. "In the first place, you shall not be mulcted much, papa; my income is too large for an invalid, who cannot go to balls and make five toilettes a day"—

"I dare say Miss Silver would not be offended if you gave her a left off gown now and then. Poor gentlewomen are used to that sort of thing."

"Papa, there are considerations far more important than my left-off gowns. Is Kitty free to accept our offer? Is her family such as to warrant us in making it?"

For some moments both were silent. Sir George was saying to himself:—"What a pity Ella is so much too good and too conscientious for this world! If Miss Silver chooses to throw up an engagement with Mrs Wingfield, what are Mrs Wingfield's feelings to us? If Miss Silver can dress upon a hund-

red a-year, why put her out of her proper sphere by giving her more? Ella's delicacy is a real misfortune, and yet I would rather lose a hundred pounds than shock her, poor darling!"

Ella's thoughts ran as follows:—"How grossly egotistical and common and little are we with all our efforts at self-refining! Here am I living in a world of books and beautiful things; yet because Kitty is of inferior birth and breeding to myself, I cannot accept Kitty's affections without reluctance. She is bright, generous, self-sacrificing, sympathetic, intensely clearheaded, all that I want in a friend, but this petty, miserable prejudice of social position makes a hypocrite of me."

"I will tell you the best thing to do," Sir George said, at last. "I must go to London before long on business. Why should I not go at once and ease your mind about Miss Silver's family and antecedents by obtaining all necessary information?"

"From whom?" asked Ella, doubtfully.

"From Mrs Wingfield, in the first instance, and from the friends at whose house Mrs Wingfield first made her acquaintance."

"Would not that be under-hand, and a little mean?" Ella said, still doubtful.

"Miss Silver need never know. Provided we do not tell her, there is no objection to the plan that I can discover. The plain truth of the matter is, Miss Silver has made herself necessary to you, and Miss Silver we must keep, at any cost. I do be-

lieve she almost saved your life in this last illness."

Ella's eyes filled.

"How can we ever repay such devotion?" she said.

"You forget that she is poor!" Sir George replied; "and that reminds me to ask you, my dear, what became of all the trinkets your aunt Frances left you? There was a pretty coral necklace, worth very little; why not give it to Miss Silver?"

"O papa! as if Kitty would wear such trumpery! But I am going to give her something on her birthday which will make her look like a queen," and Ella instructed Sir George to bring out a certain little case from her drawer, and take from it two or three strings of exquisite pearls.

"They—are—not—out—of—your—own—jewel-case?" gasped her father.

"I ought first to have told you that they were bought on purpose for Kitty," answered Ella, "knowing your dislike to anything going out of the family. These were never in the family, papa. How lovely they are, and how Kitty will love them for my sake!" and for Kitty's sake she kissed them before they were put away.

Sir George having decided to go to England, decided to go at once, and Kitty had to be told. Ella was a very bad actor. She felt perfectly guiltless of any treachery in her own heart towards her friend, but the mere fact of Sir George's errand

seemed mean and under-hand, and she hated herself for being the prime mover in such a step. In spite of all her efforts to the contrary, she showed evident embarrassment of manner when the subject of her father's journey was brought forward, excusing the journey unnecessarily, apologising to Kitty for it, and saying a hundred things that aroused Kitty's suspicions. Ella would fain have been doubly and trebly loving to Kitty just now; for had she not watched by her bedside during nights of suffering, and tended her like a sister? But she could not play the hypocrite; she could not show a fondness and confidence in words that her deeds wholly wanted. So poor Ella, after the way of very sensitive people, tormented herself and punished herself a thousand times more than occasion required.

Kitty had vague grounds for uneasiness. She saw plainly enough that there was some secret at the bottom of Sir George's sudden departure for England; but how could such a secret affect her directly? She could hardly believe herself to be of so much importance in Ella's or her father's eyes as to imagine that the journey was made on her account. And yet she felt instinctively that she had something to do with it.

Did they suspect any secret engagement existing between herself and a man of inferior station? Did they know of her engagement with Dr Norman? Had Myra compromised her in their eyes? Kitty asked herself a hundred questions of this kind.

She felt it just possible that Myra might have worked a little mischief. Myra had given up all idea of going to Arcachon now, and by every post entreated Kitty to return to her. But Ella was ill—and how could she go? Then Sir George was obliged to visit England, and how could she leave Ella alone? There was always a plausible reason for Kitty remaining where she was; and Myra's patience was on the verge of giving way, when a diversion came in the shape of her old lover, the ugly, the clever, the fascinating Captain Longley.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

PERRY'S PILGRIMAGE.

It was Polly Cornford who had persuaded—nay, constrained—Perry to make a little tour, though at starting he had no more idea of meeting Kitty than he had of meeting any other person at all like her. What with Perry's liking for Laura, and Laura's liking for Perry, poor Mrs Cornford had led an uneasy life of it for weeks past. All that was best and brightest in Perry's nature seemed to be consumed by his passion for Kitty, burnt up, shrivelled, destroyed. Who could recognise in the morose, quarrelsome, bitter Perry of to-day, his old, enthusiastic, genial, sweet-natured, sociable self?

Perhaps Laura was the only person who would not believe him changed; and to her, in truth, he tried to be the same. His motive was a kind one, but the consequences of it were cruel. Laura looked upon all the world as unjust to poor Perry, and tried to make up for the injustice of the world by extra kindness on her part. Perry accepted her consolations in spite of himself.

But a day came when Perry's sense of danger, and Mrs Cornford's exhortations, prevailed over every other consideration, and he went away. He did not want to ruin any one but himself. He thought that Laura would soon forget him.

"Whatever you do, don't write to her," Mrs Cornford had said at parting. "Folly spoken is as harmless as a dishonoured bill; folly written down, is an I O U that you must pay one day. Send her your love if you like, but don't come back to Paradise Place till you've recovered your senses, or married a black woman."

"Don't be so horribly afraid of my coming back, my good soul," Perry said, with unpardonable sourness. "You can let my studio to-morrow, if you like."

"Perugino, if I didn't love you as your own mother might do"—

"Might, but didn't," interrupted Mr Perry, with admirable satire. "You forget that she ran away from my father, and no more thought of me than if I had been a little rat in her cupboard."

"O Perry! you make a bad hand at acting the brute; your heart is in the right place, as the ass said to the master who cudgelled him. But when you are thousands of miles away you will think of Polly Cornford, the veritablest ass that ever was, and wish you had not cudgelled her so often."

"Good-bye, and God bless you!" Perry said, kissing her in a boyish fit of penitence. "Why did you pick Kitty and me out of the gutter, to serve you thus?"

Then he pushed his way on to the platform of the Chemin de Fer de l'Ouest, and never looked back at poor Polly, who was crying in the third-class waiting-room.

She went back, after a time, consoled. If anything could effect Perry's cure, she felt that it was foreign travel. He loved travel as passionately as only artists can. In his prime days of enjoyment, and zealous, though intermittent laboriousness, a trip to Havre or Dieppe, effected at the least possible cost, had refreshed and invigorated him for months. A run down to Harwich by boat would be a tonic alike to mind and body; a day at Marlow would inspire him with rapture; for it is the enviable faculty of the born artist to renew his strength by briefest glimpses of the beautiful world of Nature, in which adverse circumstances do not permit him to spend his days. Mrs Cornford had packed Perry's knapsack with her own hands, putting in all sorts of things he might want: drugs for

the cure of ague and cholera, woollen vests, waterproof mocassins, and money. Having done this, she sent a blessing after him, and went home to paint laboriously for the support and education of her orphan nieces, and the benefit of her poor relations in general.

Perry set off on his travels, wilfully determined to see nothing, enjoy nothing, paint nothing. He traversed the lovely region of La Dordogne in perfect autumnal weather, without losing his evil temper, and reached Bordeaux in as dull, morbid, unproductive state of mind as a man could well be. There he had unexpectedly come upon traces of Kitty. Turning over the pages of the Visitor's Guide, he saw this entry—*Sir George Bartelotte and party, en route to Arcachon*—and of course he must see Kitty at any cost.

When Kitty left him, almost savage with a new sense of disappointment, he was divided between two minds. He was no more to Kitty than the pebbles under his feet, but Laura loved him, and the little love he had to give would suffice to make her happy. Should he retrace his steps, and marry Laura, and earn a living by painting pictures as best he could? Or should he go on, caring for no one, letting no one care for him, and painting only when the fancy took him? He decided to choose between these two courses by tossing up three francs.

Heads were for going forwards, tails for return-

ing home. Heads decided that he was to go on. So he went on.

He spent two or three days at Biarritz, and from thence—always travelling by third class and sleeping in cheap little inns—journeyed across the Pyrenees into Spain. He passed the weird region of the Landes, which at other times would have affected him with eerie, fanciful moods; and the demon still clung to him. The weather was one long pageant of golden sunshine,—Nature, like a coquette, seeming to make herself more beautiful than ever, in order to win back the heart of the poor, unhappy, forsaken young artist. Who, even in the Pyrenees, saw such skies, such mountains, such pine woods, such stars as he? For Nature fêtes not the princes and possessors of the land, but her lovers, with the greatest of her noontide glories and sunset pomps; she puts a carpet of flowers under their feet, she sends wild, beautiful birds across their way, who sing to them. And Perry had glimpses and snatches of rapture in spite of himself. “It is of no use for me to paint anything,” he would say, but he painted, nevertheless.

“Oh! what a divine world were this,” he thought, “if Kitty or I had never been born! Were I not such a poor devil going to the bad,” he mused, “I would pick up Spanish—it is such an enchanting language from beginning to end.”

And he found the world divine in spite of Kitty,

and picked up Spanish, though a poor devil going to the bad.

It is quite wonderful in how many ways genius contrives to manifest itself. Perry had not been on Spanish soil a fortnight before he could talk in very pretty Castilian, play the guitar a little, dance a bolero, and sing half a hundred *coplas*. He did these things with such winning abandonment of manner, and was, moreover, so fascinating with his large blue eyes, clear, slightly sunburnt complexion, and dark gold-brown curls and beard, that he was always obliged to leave pleasant places because some pretty Pepa or Gregoria had fallen in love with him. What were Pepas or Gregorias to him? A delusion and a snare only, so he made good his escape before entangled past extrication. Poor Perry was as little inclined to turn gay Lothario now as when a mere boy he had courted his handsome, sulky, slatternly Kitty, in the happy past. Dissipation had no sort of temptation for him. He had tried dissipation in Paris, as we have seen, but his natural temperament kept him young, and made hope and other good things possible.

Poor Perry's diary in these days was touchingly wayward and simple. He sent from time to time such valuable pieces of information as these to Polly Cornford—Polly Cornford, who wept for him and prayed, in a fashion, for him with the tenderness of a mother.

*“Burgos, 12th October.—*Nothing to paint, so I came away.

*“Valladolid.—*Here I fell ill, of low fever. The landlord's daughter, Isidora, gave me disgusting drinks of herbs and pills. She was very pretty and very kind, but I could not forgive the pills.

*“Escorial.—*I got such a good dinner here, but felt just as miserable after it as before.

*“Madrid.—*Velasquez was a wonderful, superior kind of human being. If he had only had Kitty to paint!

*“Madrid, 2d entry.—*Do you know anything about Goya, dear Polly? I don't, but his pictures are to be seen here. What a wretch I am not to enjoy these galleries!

*“Madrid, 3d entry.—*I don't enjoy Madrid, so of what use to go on? And yet I go on. I suppose it is every one's fate to go on, and not to like it.”

And when he was fairly in Andalusia, “the sweetest morsel of the Peninsula,” of which Polly Cornford would fain have had glowing suggestions, he tantalised her with the following letter:—

“DEAR POLLY,

“I have often heard you say that ‘an ass in Spain is sure to bray in Portugal,’ and I never heard one of your proverbs that better applied to me. I am just as much of a fool concerning one particular person as ever; and I hate myself for letting that sweet child, Laura Norman, think so

well of me. Tell her I am the biggest scoundrel on the face of the earth, with my love, please.

"The women at Granada are very pretty. We had a jolly little dance last night. I do think I could make my fortune as a Spanish dancer in London. Little Isidora here would dance all over the world with me, I am sure.

"Yours affectionately,

"PERRY.

"P.S.—I paint very little; a few daubs, which I sell on the way, that is all."

Perry had fallen in with a rich Englishman at Granada who loved art when he could get it cheap, and to him he had sold a dozen exquisite suggestions of the Alhambra, for about five pounds each. The pictures were carefully packed, insured, and sent to adorn a country-house in England; the money was squandered ere it could fairly be called Perry's own.

He lingered in Granada, captivated, intoxicated, entranced by its gracious, fanciful beauty. For a time the sense of the perfection surrounding him, both of nature and of art, held him spell-bound and happy. What where his insignificant life and love? what was anything in all the world beside the Alhambra? But this exalted mood passed away, leaving him again sad, and small, and self-encumbered.

Wherever he went he found rich, parsimonious

English and American travellers, who would buy his pictures, which were almost as cheap as photographs, and a hundred times as valuable. Thus he paid his expenses as he went along, and was always in the predicament either of having his pockets full of money, or wanting a hundred reals to pay his landlord's bill.

So he travelled on. He went to Seville, to Cadiz, and from thence to Gibraltar, always seeing marvellous things with those unforgetting, artistic eyes of his, and always ungraciously longing to turn back.

At Gibraltar his indecision took a stronger form. One day he took a berth in a steamer going to Bordeaux; the next, he half settled to sail for Liverpool; on the third, he really sailed for the shores of Africa.

"Kitty is only a woman—I will forget her," he said; "and what will remind me of Kitty in Africa?"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

PERRY'S PILGRIMAGE (CONTINUED).

PERRY landed at a little seaboard town, called Némours, on the borders of Morocco; and when he had climbed one or two fiery-coloured, sierra-shaped hills, and looked across the broad blue sea on one side, and the waving pale-gold desert on the other, he set off with a couple of French

colonists, who were making the inland journey on horseback. Perry had hardly felt so happy for years as he did to find himself on a plump little barb, with pistols at his side, which he was assured would prove of use. He had never ridden anything before better than a melancholy seaside hack, let out at a shilling an hour, and his sole knowledge of pistol-shooting consisted of target practice at Epsom races; but his companions, with inborn ineffable French amiability, took pains to teach him what was necessary, and Perry came to no mischief. How the good little horse liked his rider is another matter.

The three travelled on in perfect harmony as far as Tclemçen—that beautiful Granada of the West, of which so few travellers know. Perry was sadly disappointed at having fallen in with no Arab thieves or assassins on the way; he had hoped for one murder, at least; but the sublime vision of the ruined Moorish capitol, rising like a tower of pure gold against an amethyst sky, consoled him. Here he parted company with his pleasant friends, and stayed a week, exquisitely alive to the touching, tranquil, fairy-like loveliness of the place. It was like dreaming over the Arabian Nights. Dainty, dark-eyed children, in bright-coloured fez and pantaloons, played in the streets, every one a real, live little Prince Bedreddin. Veiled women glided among the dusky olive groves. The beautiful white mosques were crowded with worshippers at the

summons of the muezzin. And when the many-coloured but tender daylight passed away, came the wondrous southern night, with skies of purplish black, and large silvery stars like moons shining direct overhead.

Perry spent half his days in cutting Kitty's name on the ruins. On the base of a majestic monolith, that had been split in two by earthquake, he cut this legend very laboriously—

“KITTY IS FALSE.”

“It cannot harm her,” he mused, as he chiselled away in the twilight, with only a little Arab goat-herd watching by. “Who will ever come here who knows either Kitty or me? But what I have written will remain for hundreds of years, and it is some consolation to hand down her perfidy from generation to generation, even on the borders of the desert.”

He painted three or four charming, mystical twilight scenes; but here, fortunately for him, there were no buyers, so the sketches were saved and put aside. At Tclemçen he fell in with a grazier bound to the farthest French station in the interior to buy sheep, who invited him to share his gig. Perry saw a vision of Bedouin encampments, wild gazelles feeding by turbulent streams, caravans coming out of yellow atmospheres, and the Great Desert beyond all, and went. It was hardly wonderful that he should go, but incredible that he should have come away. To live in the open air—in a

wide, fresh world, without cities or conventionalities; to breathe the sweet, fragrant atmosphere of the desert; to see savage life in its gayest, most genial aspect; to share the Bedouin's hospitality,—all this fulfilled the dreams of Perry's boyhood. He grew broader, browner, and stronger than he had ever been in his life. He learned to saddle a horse, to shoot the jackal, to hunt the gazelle, to use his muscles in all sorts of ways. He could say a hundred things in the most astonishing Arabic, full of whistling aspirates and wonderful sibilations. He found himself forgetting to be unhappy; yet he could not rest. The grazier said to him one day—

"You are young, you like adventures, you want to see what this country is like. Be my partner. I dare say you have a few thousand francs—all you Englishmen are rich."

"I haven't a sou. I'm a painter," Perry said.

"*Eh bien!* stay with me for a few months. You're welcome to bed and board, if you will be a little handy now and then; a painter couldn't be better placed."

Perry shook his head.

"I should like it, but the truth is, I've been hardly used by a woman, and though she will no more marry me than she will marry you, I can't rest so far away from her."

So Perry forsook the life that he loved so well, and joined the first party to be heard of travelling to Oran. Oran is a stately, prosperous, half-Spanish

city, two days' journey from Gibraltar, from which one can sail to all parts of the world. Perry went down to the harbour as soon as he arrived, in search of some vessel that would carry him to any English port at a cheaper rate than the mail-packet. He bargained with the master of a cattle-steamer, bound to Harwich in a day or two, and had paid his passage-money, and carried his chattels on board, when a marvellous thing happened.

Winter was over now, and the balmy, delicious, southern spring had appeared like a dream in the night. With the sunshine and the south wind came beautiful, graceful pleasure-boats, like white-winged birds, which fluttered to the harbour, and there rested for a while. Perry watched them with childish glee, as he loitered on the shore, sketch-book in hand, and hoped that in the next stage of existence he should be the owner of one of those pretty yachts, and not the poor artist drawing it from a distance with longing eyes.

One morning he lay at full length on the sands, watching a yacht come in; she was an elegant little craft, and scudded along in a fair wind at such a rate that one might have fancied a pirate-ship was at her heels. Perry saw a red flag hoisted in the harbour with a smile of contempt.

"Why on earth should they hoist colours?" he said; "they haven't got Kitty on board!"

By the time he had made a little sketch of the yacht she was very near the harbour, and Perry

put up his glass to see what kind of people were on board.

The party consisted of about nine ladies and gentlemen, all English, as Perry surmised, and of the stereotyped order of travellers. There were one or two fashionable young ladies in straw hats and thick serge dresses; one or two young men with long limbs, broad shoulders—bearded immensely; the invariable amateur author or artist, with pockets crammed full of sketch-books and French novels; the invariable elderly papa, with the broad shoulders, and good-humoured, Philistine, purse-proud smile. Perry was about to put down his glass superciliously, when he caught sight of a face that made him grow pale and eager in a moment.

He thought he must be dreaming, and looked again and again.

He was not dreaming.

The yacht had been honoured for a good cause. She had got Kitty on board!

It was as true as the sun shining over his head, as the millions on millions of little waves that rippled at his feet. What woman in the wide world could be mistaken—even momentarily—for Kitty? Look, figure, tread, were as much her own as particular tones of her voice, and particular hues of her eye. The very turn of her shoulders would proclaim her among a thousand women.

Perry rushed from one sailor to the other, in frantic curiosity. To whom did the yacht belong?

Whither was she bound? How long would she stay in port?—and so on.

No one knew anything, except that the yacht belonged to an Englishman in the diplomatic service at Gibraltar—which accounted for the colours being hoisted—and that she would most likely make for Algiers.

“The English always go to Algiers. It is such a gay place,” said one; and Perry could learn no more.

He skulked about the harbour all that day, determined to follow the yacht at any risk. Some of the party came on shore, but Kitty was not of the number, and Perry only saw her come on deck once or twice. Towards evening he contrived to have a little talk with the mate on his way to the town, and from him learned that the yacht would sail for Algiers next day, and would probably put in there for six weeks.

Perry of course tried to get back his passage-money, but the captain proving irascible he yielded the point loftily, and spent his last Napoleon in paying for a second class fare by mail-packet to Algiers. Unfortunately the steamer did not start for two days, during which Perry fretted as feverishly as if an important issue depended upon his arrival in Algiers. He knew well enough that nothing but disappointment would follow upon any intercourse he might have with Kitty. He could no more keep away from her than the moth can

keep from the candle that burns its wings so cruelly.

The yacht had a fair wind, and reached Algiers ere the mail-packet was half-way. For various good reasons she lay-to a few hours instead of weeks, and was scudding homewards before Perry put foot on shore.

CHAPTER XL.

HOW SIR GEORGE FARED ON HIS ERRAND.

SIR GEORGE set off in a state of excitement that bordered on elation. If one thing in the world was almost as dear to him as his daughter, it was his ducats; and he felt that to secure Kitty as a member of his household would be an inestimable piece of economy. He was one of the few men who could mix up his admiration for a young and fascinating woman with the baldest mercenary consideration. Kitty was handsome, and he admired her; Kitty was clever, and he liked her company; Kitty was masterly in dealing with the common affairs of life; for that quality he adored her.

Poor Sir George's nature had been embittered by various causes. In the first place, he began life by marrying a penniless girl for love, an act of self-sacrifice for which he could never quite forgive himself, especially as she had borne him no

son. In the second, his name and estate would go to the man he disliked above all others in the world. Thirdly, he was comparatively poor, and could only provide for Ella's future by letting his house in Clarges Street, and his country seat, and living economically abroad.

He had one extravagance—namely, a passion for old rare books; but that one bore the same relation to his numerous economies as the Corsair's "one virtue linked unto a thousand crimes." He travelled second class when alone; dressed as shabbily as decency permitted; drank cheap wine with water; dined off a single dish; and answered people's letters on the blank leaf of their own. In fine, where ordinarily economical people spent a shilling, he spent about ninepence; if fairly out of Ella's sight, sixpence. What the grosser pleasures of the world were to other men, the pleasures of saving were to him. To feel himself at liberty to be as economical as he pleased was a little debauch of which he could not make enough. He grew gay, brisk, and affectionately disposed towards the world when thus inebriated; would be courteous to the pitch of geniality with the second or third class passengers with whom he travelled; would be civil to French officials, whom he detested; would offer a cigar to any one sitting next him. When reckoning up the expenses of the day, he chuckled to himself, and praised himself as if he had achieved

a great action, and would enjoy the profound sleep of a happy conscience.

As soon as the business that took him to London was fairly over, he presented himself at Mrs Wingfield's lodgings in Green Street.

Myra received everybody cordially, and over a charming little tête-à-tête lunch, which Sir George did not disdain, as he only practised abstemiousness when it answered some end, they talked a great deal of Kitty and Kitty's affairs.

Simple as Myra was, she got Sir George to tell her all that she wanted to know before saying a word; and then, much too tickled at the new turn affairs were taking to be angry, she burst into a hearty laugh, and said—

“My dear Sir George, what an odd notion to think of concerning yourself about Kitty's antecedents or belongings! Nobody in the world does that. Of course, Kitty has friends and lovers, and may have what you call antecedents, for aught I know; but, so long as she contrives to keep them so beautifully in the background, what matters it to us?”

She opened her large, sleepy, blue eyes, and fixing them on Sir George's wizen, hairy face with an inexpressible mixture of childish *naïveté* and womanly shrewdness, added—

“You might, with perfect safety, marry Kitty, Sir George. She would take care that her family or family affairs never annoyed you.”

"I don't want to marry Miss Silver," Sir George said, pettishly. "I want to make your dear Ella happy—that is all."

"Ella is a spoiled child crying for Kitty instead of the moon," Myra rejoined; "but the moon won't come down, and Kitty will."

"Ella is so excessively tender of conscience that she would not for worlds make any proposals to Miss Silver till after I had seen you. We feel, indeed, that we stand in a delicate position with regard to yourself"——

"As if I should hold you responsible"——

"I do assure you that we have never once urged her to remain with us longer than her previous arrangements with you would enable her to do so," Sir George continued, apologetically.

"Kitty is a free agent. I never held her bound except by her inclinations and affections," Myra said, a little bitterly.

"I am thankful to hear you say so, Mrs Wingfield. Dear Ella has been quite troubled lest we should appear to have acted an unfriendly part towards you."

"Kitty left me because she liked it, and she will stay with you for the same reason," Myra answered.

"I hope she will not change her mind in a great hurry. That is all."

"I don't think she will change her mind, because she is so devotedly attached to Ella. They are like sisters," Sir George said.

"Oh! that counts for nothing. She loved me like a sister a few months back."

Sir George did not think any worse of Kitty for thus being spoken of by her dearest friend. On the contrary, he rather admired Kitty for showing so much sagacity in the selection of her patrons. Of course, Kitty knew well enough how immeasurably superior Ella's social position was to Myra's—the former a baronet's daughter, the latter a merchant's widow! Sir George laughed in his sleeve at Myra's insensibility to this view of the question; and as he liked the little lady, and had no particular motive for undeceiving her, he allowed her to go on deceiving herself. Kitty adored his darling Ella; but it seemed preposterous that Myra should even have expected adoration in equal degree. Excepting in Kitty's case—for Kitty was an exception to every rule—Sir George completely confounded personalities with circumstances. A person stood represented in his mind as the sum total of so much wealth, so much rank, and so many worldly advantages in general. Mere intellectual attainments—whether scientific, literary, social, or artistic—went for very little; amiabilities and moral qualities were altogether ignored.

He returned pertinaciously to the matter of Kitty's kith and kin.

"My dear Ella being so young and motherless, I feel it my duty to know something definite about this young lady's position in the world. She will

not marry. A girl without a penny rarely marries out of her own sphere; and if she is to be Ella's companion for years to come, we want to feel sure that no poor or disreputable relations can come down upon us."

"Ask Dr Norman, then," Myra said, not caring to become responsible in the matter. "He wanted to marry Kitty, and if that does not look like putting trust in her, what does?"

Sir George thought this a good idea, and, after a little more talk, rose to go, Myra adding a word of advice on the threshold.

"If you are guided by me," she said at parting, "you will just give Kitty big lumps of sugar, and not trouble your head about anything else. What good are pedigrees to clever people?"

When her visitor had gone, Myra went to her room, and cried for an hour over Kitty's unkind behaviour. She was going back to India, the wife of Captain Longley; but was not her approaching marriage an extra reason for needing her friend?

Myra was not romantic. She knew the world very well, and she entertained no sentimental notions about love and marriage. She had been married before, and she understood the necessity of husband and wife not boring each other, if they would be happy. But she was so terribly dependent on others, that she felt she must inevitably bore Captain Longley if she were shut up with him alone in some station up country. If Kitty were but with

her always, to organise a little society, all would go smoothly. Myra really cared for Kitty, and she now declared to herself bitterly that she would never again trust a friend as she had trusted this false one.

Sir George went down to Shelley House next day, determined to fulfil his errand to the best of his ability, in spite of Myra's somewhat flippant deprecations.

It is just possible that there may have been a touch of jealousy at the bottom of this obstinacy. Sir George no more dreamed of marrying Kitty than he dreamed of marrying Myra: but had she not smiled upon him and flattered him in a hundred ways, wearing the colours he liked best, singing his favourite songs, and reminding him from day to day that his admiration was worth the having?

Kitty had often talked of Shelley House, of her kind, admirable friend Dr Norman, of his high-spirited, self-managed children, and all the love they bore her. She had, moreover, hinted at having been a sort of governess to the little girls; but beyond the period of her sojourn at Shelley House, Kitty's account of herself was as vague as the carboniferous epoch in geological history. Whilst Sir George and Ella remained abroad, moving from place to place, not fixing their abode anywhere, it little mattered whether Ella's friend and companion was the daughter of a clergyman—or a chimney-sweep; but if they came to England, or settled

down at Rome, Brussels, or Paris, it would be quite another thing.

So Sir George determined to find out from the man who had wanted to marry Kitty whether she was a person fit to live with his daughter; and as the question was a delicate one, he pondered on the best mode of putting it.

But he was doomed to a temporary disappointment. On inquiring for Shelley House at the railway station, he was informed that Dr Norman had lately lost a considerable sum of money by a bank failure; that he had in consequence left the country for some time; that Shelley House had been put into proper order and let for a term of years, and that the owner was living in a very small house in London.

Sir George walked to the house that had been Kitty's home for so many ambitious months, and having obtained Dr Norman's address from its new tenant, returned to London in a very bad temper indeed. He had spent exactly nineteen shillings and sixpence for no purpose. It was a vexatious thought.

CHAPTER XLI.

WHAT DR NORMAN SAID ON KITTY'S BEHALF.

DR NORMAN had hired a pretty cottage in the Addison Road, Kensington, boasting of a little

flower-garden in front, and a little croquet-lawn and shrubbery at the back; and, though a mere doll's house compared to Shelley, pleasant enough. The situation was, moreover, quiet, healthful, and convenient. Novelty delights the young; and Dr Norman's children thought it a splendid thing that papa should have brought them to London, within reach of the South Kensington Museum, the Crystal Palace, the Polytechnic, the Zoological Gardens, and so many bewitching places. Dr Norman was not one of those men who do things by halves; and when he woke up one morning, and found himself on the verge of poverty, he set to work to retrieve his fortune by every means in his power. It was the immediate loss of some thousands of pounds by the failure of a bank that had induced him to look into his affairs, and he was aghast at the inroads made upon a fair patrimony by the mismanagement and neglect of a few years. So he withdrew Regy from college, and sent him to a German University; put the younger boys to University College School instead of Eton and Harrow; let his land to a respectable farmer on a long lease, and his home to a wealthy friend; reduced his staff of servants to three maids; and resolved to turn the steady work of years to some account at last.

Prissy had not yet decided what sort of education would be best for herself and Laura, declaring that nothing could be thought of at present but the

arrangement of the house. What with choosing chintzes, buying flowers for the little conservatory, hanging up pictures, and the like, the little maid was in her element; and when Sir George presented himself, who should open the door but Miss Prissy, a long lilac apron tied over her short frock, her fair hair blown about wildly, looking the very impersonation of briskness and bustle.

"Oh, dear!" she said, when Sir George gave her his card, requesting to see her papa; "we didn't want visitors yet, and especially such grand ones. The hall is littered with books and things, and my doll's linen is hanging on the stairs to dry"—

"Prissy," put in Laura from the dining-room, "ask the gentleman in."

So Prissy held the door about a quarter of a yard open, and led the way to Dr Norman's study, a quiet room at the top of the house, talking volubly all the way.

"It is such an undertaking to move," she said; "how many times have you moved? And how many little girls have you? This is our bath-room. Isn't it a nice one? We all have baths every day, and the dolls once a week. Have you got such a nice bath-room in your house?"—and so on.

Dr Norman looked very fairly at home among his books, scientific appliances, and cabinet of fossils, considering that they had only been unpacked within the last week or two. He bore the inter-

ruption with the suavity of a proverbially absent man, colouring a little when Sir George announced himself. What could have brought Kitty's new friend to him?

"Prissy, give Sir George Bartelotte a chair," he said; and finding that a matter of time, since all the chairs were full, added, "you are our first visitor in our new house."

Sir George apologised, as in duty bound to do, and then fidgeted a little, not knowing how to begin.

Dr Norman relieved him of his embarrassment, by saying, quite quietly—

"I believe that a lady who was very dear to my children once is now under your roof. Is Miss Silver well and happy?"

"Remarkably well, and in the best possible spirits. Ahem—it is of Miss Silver I wish to speak to you."

Sir George paused and fidgeted.

Dr Norman made no sort of effort to help him.

"My daughter has become quite attached to Miss Silver," said Sir George, pompously.

"Indeed!" was Dr Norman's reply.

"Of course such an attachment afford's matter for serious consideration."

Dr Norman was silent.

"Differences of social position—ahem—possibility of embarrassments in the future, deter Miss Bartelotte

and myself from prematurely securing Miss Silver's valuable services in the future."

"Confound the fellow," thought Dr Norman, "he speaks of Kitty as if she were a lady's-maid!"

"Whilst we feel that it is one of these occasions deserving sacrifice on our part," Sir George went on, loftily, "my daughter is an invalid, and requires about her a lady who would be at the same time a devoted friend and a conscientious adviser. This young lady seems in every way fitted for the post. She is a capital arithmetician, an indefatigable *menagère*, an incomparable economist, and Miss Bartelotte feels towards her as an equal. But we know nothing of Miss Silver's family, absolutely nothing."

Then he looked at Dr Norman, and waited. Dr Norman was as uncommunicative as a statue.

"We thought that perhaps you might be able to give us some information, Dr Norman."

"Miss Silver stayed for some time in my house as a welcome and honoured guest, and only consented to prolong her stay indefinitely on the condition that she should help my little girls in managing the household," answered Dr Norman. "We did not wish Miss Silver to go. She went of her own accord."

"And Miss Silver came to you as a stranger?"

"As a guest," replied Dr Norman; adding, with a smile, "one hardly expects of one's guests that

they bring a reference, like servants, as to honesty and good behaviour."

This sarcasm nettled Sir George.

"But you will grant the case to be different with a young lady of my daughter's rank," he said.

"We should be acting unfairly towards Miss Silver, if we placed her in a sphere to which she had no right, and from which she might be unpleasantly ejected by the merest trifle. We want to prevent any possible misunderstanding or complication in the future, before it is finally settled that she remains with us. But, since you cannot give me any information, I will no longer trespass on your time."

"I know of only one person who could tell you whether Miss Silver is a proper person to enter upon the duties of Miss Bartelotte's friend and conscientious adviser," Dr Norman said, "and that is the lady with whom she lived before coming to us. Here is her card. She is an admirable person though very unconventional in her mode of life. By all means call upon her."

And he put Mrs Cornford's card into Sir George's hand, and bowed him out with formal politeness.

"Incomparable snob!" thought the philosopher. "Pedantic prig!" thought the aristocrat, as the two men parted.

Dr Norman returned to his work in a very impatient frame of mind. He was an exceedingly modest man, estimating himself and his social

position at their lowest worth; but he could not help thinking that Kitty was about to sell herself into slavery, and that, as his wife, she would have been free, honoured, and happy. He was of too frank and affectionate a nature to deem otherwise—always supposing that Kitty cared for him—since he would have cut off his right hand rather than accept a sacrifice from any woman. Well, she had chosen for herself, and he could only hope that her choice was a happy one. Their paths had diverged as entirely as the paths of travellers bound eastward and westward, and he trusted that they might never again meet. Kitty had used him hardly, and his heart was very bitter towards her still. She was not only guilty of treachery, but she was guilty of slow, wilful, it almost seemed premeditated, treachery; and he was not yet trying to forgive her. He was trying hard not only to make the best of his life, but to make something good of it. His unfortunate passion for Kitty had worked healthfully—as all good men's passions do;—in the first instance, arousing him to a sense of fresher, more hopeful, younger life; in the last, spurring him on to seek satisfaction and happiness elsewhere. Disappointment was teaching him to be just to himself. The one supreme grief of his life had palsied his energies for a while; the smaller one had quickened them. He had been so badly used by one unworthy of him, that indignation became ambition.

"The world cannot use me so ill as Kitty has done," he said, "and I will go in and strive with my fellow-men."

To be properly estimated we must live among our equals; and Dr Norman, who had passed with his country neighbours as a very poor creature indeed, soon found his level in London. He selected a choice circle of friends, threw himself heart and soul into his own special line of scientific speculation, and lived a life of thoughtfulness and activity. The loss of his money affected him chiefly for his children's sake. He felt that it would only have happened to a man as careless and self-absorbed as himself, and determined that his boys and girls should not go unprovided for because of their father's fault. To fit the former for professions, and to give the latter the best education possible, was an end for which he was ready to make any effort or sacrifice in his power. He resolved to work.

CHAPTER XLII.

WHAT MRS CORNFORD SAID ON KITTY'S BEHALF.

NEVER had Paradise Place looked more unmitigatedly disreputable than on the occasion of Sir George Bartelotte's visit. It was now winter-time, when the London atmosphere sucks all the colour out of everything, and makes shabbiness—whether

natural or artificial—doubly shabby, and poverty—whether cheerful or melancholy—doubly poverty-stricken. Upon the occasion in question a slight fall of snow had taken place, and Mrs Cornford's nieces, with all the hilarity and unconcern of youth, were sweeping the steps of the little colony, and snowballing each other and the passers-by. The three girls had tucked up their petticoats and were splashing their untidy little legs and skirts, and brandishing their brooms like the happy gipsies they were. On seeing Sir George knock at Aunty's door, Binnie refrained from sending a well-aimed snowball at his face, and rushed to open it, calling out at the top of her voice, "Aunty, here's a gentleman! It's so jolly, and we haven't near done sweeping yet!"

Then Miss Binnie slammed the door violently, leaving Sir George in the dark, dirty passage to await Mrs Cornford's pleasure. The heart of the baronet sank within him as he took in at a glance all the rollicking, unvarnished, out-spoken Bohemianism of the place. A dirty little lamp burned in the hall; a couple of liqueur glasses and a bottle of Hollands stood on a little bracket beside it; a heap of coals, evidently borrowed of some neighbour, lay in one corner; whilst overhead, hanging so low as to flap unpleasantly in the face of passers-by, were various articles of linen put out to dry.

Sir George stood aghast. It seemed to him that

Kitty's self, Kitty's devotion, and Kitty's economies, were lost to him and Ella for ever.

As he waited thus, Mrs Cornford's voice came down from one of the upper rooms.

"I hope you don't mind waiting, whoever you may be?" she said. "'Take things easy and you 'll grow fat,' as the snail said to the grasshopper. If you were the King of the Cannibal Islands I could'nt come down till I have laid on my next coat of paint; but I'll do it before you can say the alphabet backwards, or tell me who was Nicodemus' grandmother."

In a few minutes she came down, the upper part of her portly person arrayed in a short blue cloth jacket like a pilot-coat, little the worse for wear, but greatly the worse for paint; her head wrapped up in an Indian scarf, that shone with the lustre of antiquity, and the pockets of her painting apron full of brushes, pencils, French novels, and walnut shells. Before greeting her visitor she stretched out one shapely arm and brought down all the linen at a blow, hurling it in a bundle to the upper landing-place; then, turning to Sir George with a good-natured smile, said—

"I've no faith in so much clean linen myself, but we must do as others do in this world."

She ushered him into the same little sitting-room where Laura had first seen Perry, nearly two years ago, and where Kitty had given Laura a drawing-lesson, with all sorts of visions floating before her

mind all the time; and, motioning him to take one arm-chair, dropped into the other with a somewhat abrupt and catechetical—

“Well?”

Sir George very pompously handed her his card, saying to himself, “If that does not put a curb upon the woman’s impudence nothing will;” but it did not put a curb upon Mrs Cornford’s impudence.

She gave an incomparable little “Whew!” of astonishment, and said, very unceremoniously—

“Oh! you’re Sir George Bartelotte, are you? Well, there’s no telling who turns up. I’m sure I should as soon have expected to see that artful little dodger, Miss Kitty herself.”

“I believe you have known Miss Silver from her earliest years?”

“I should just think I have. Don’t I know her? that’s all! ‘Blood is thicker than water, but you and I are related by other ties,’ said the costermonger’s dog to the costermonger’s donkey, ‘for the same stick beats us both.’ And Kitty and I, though not related, have had our ups and downs together.”

“Miss Silver speaks of her family as having greatly suffered from reduced circumstances.”

“Stuff!” Mrs Cornford answered, very impatiently. “I might as well say my circumstances are reduced, because I’ve had only one gown to my back all my life.”

"It's quite astonishing that so accomplished a young lady should have had no more advantages," pursued Sir George.

"For my part," said Mrs Cornford, putting on her H's with unusual recklessness, "I think she has done mighty little, living among artists and art-critics as she did, and having all sorts of opportunities. But there was never any making an artist of Kitty Silver. A little money was more to her than all the arts and artists that ever were, as I always said to that foolish boy Perry, when head and ears in love with her."

Sir George trembled in his shoes at what would come next. It was all over with Ella's plan, he said to himself—Kitty must not stay any longer with them; beautiful, gifted as she was, she must go.

"What was Miss Silver's father?" he asked, in rather a crestfallen manner. For the first time during the interview the motive of Sir George's coming dawned upon Mrs Cornford's mind. Now, poor Polly Cornford had not a particle of malice in her composition, and had forgiven Kitty's shortcomings towards herself long ago; but for the life of her she could not help playing Sir George a trick at Kitty's expense. The pompous little monkey, she thought, I'll teach her not to insult artists again!

"Oh! you've come here for Kitty's character, have you?" she asked.

"I have come, madam," replied Sir George, with

loftiness, "to inquire whether Miss Silver's family is of such a stamp as would justify me in retaining her as the companion of my daughter."

"There's no deception about us. You see what we are," said Mrs Cornford, glancing round the room with a wave of the hand; "that picture opposite to you is worth three hundred pounds, and was given me by the artist C—— (naming a celebrated French artist), a sad unprincipled scapegrace, but such a colourist! 'Madame Cornford,' he said, 'I hope to see you R. A. before I die—I look upon you as a sister.' 'The nation is an ass, and you won't,' I said. We keep good company, I assure you. That sketch on the mantelpiece was given me by a man whose brains are worth thousands a year; he comes here when all the world is gaping at his pictures on the Academy walls, and smokes a cigarette with me as simple-hearted as possible. 'There are very few people who are such good company as you, Polly,' he says. 'I can return the compliment, Jemmy,' I reply; and when the cigarettes are done, we have a bottle of Sauterne and drink to the health of our critics. There's no sort of pretence about us. 'But don't eat us unless you like,' say the thistles to the donkey, and that is what I say to you. We're good-meaning people, who never object to oblige a neighbour by lending him our Sunday clothes, but we're not quite respectable—only a little respectable." Mrs Cornford added, briskly,

"But have a little Hollands this cold day—do, now."

"I require no refreshments, I thank you, madam," Sir George said, stiffly; "and, indeed, I think it hardly necessary to trespass on your time further," and he rose as if to go.

"Hoity-toity, twiddle-dum-dee!" Mrs Cornford cried; "you seem as flustered as the devil in a gale of wind. Having told you what we are, I will tell you what Kitty is; for she's no more like us than a cuckoo is like a cucumber. I wish she were."

Sir Georg sat down.

"If you think that Kitty's old friends will ever come in her way, you are greatly mistaken," Mrs Cornford continued; "she loves us—oh! how she loves us—at a distance!"

"Miss Silver's father was in the Church, I believe?" asked Sir George, thinking that the latter part of Mrs Cornford's speech augured well.

"I should think he was in the Church, if anybody ever was! He was a Presbyterian minister, and his name was the Reverend Nehemiah Silver, and he married the only daughter of the younger son of Sir Thomas Mistletoe, who hated the match; and he (the parson) went out as a missionary to try and convert the Himalayan Mountains."

"I presume, madam, you mean some uncivilised tribes dwelling in the Hymalayan regions?" said Sir George.

"Just as you please," Mrs Cornford went on; "all I know is that he did not make many converts, and it so preyed upon his mind that he died of a broken heart; and if you ever go that way—his grave lies exactly half-way between Astracan and Pekin—you will see written somewhere on the stone his name, age, and birthplace. Ah! poor Kitty, little you know what a father you lost in him!"—and Mrs Cornford held her apron to her face to hide the laughter that she could not control.

It has been already hinted that Kitty's parentage was a hazy affair; but if we want our coat of arms made out, we go to the herald's office and get a fine crest in a twinkling: why should we be more scrupulous about other fictions? Kitty had called the one a clergyman and the other a daughter of the youngest son of a baronet, whose title was now extinct, and no one had any ground for supposing the statements to be imaginary.

Mrs Cornford started from her chair and seized Sir George by the arm with a convulsive grip.

"Whatever you do, don't harrow up poor Kitty's feelings by talking of this. She cannot bear to be reminded that she has lost a father—and such a father!"

"And has Miss Silver's youth been spent here?" asked Sir George, not dreaming that Mrs Cornford was making fun of him.

"Oh! bless your soul, no. She was here in the flesh—but what's that? A swan is always a swan,

though it condescends to feed with the ducks. And Miss Kitty condescended to feed with the ducks till something better turned up. You see, we are only a little respectable, and she was always the fine lady."

"And you think that—ahem—no inconvenience would arise to us in consequence of Miss Silver's early connections?"

"Inconvenience!" cried Mrs Cornford, indignantly. "Kitty Silver would scorn to put us to shame by the spectacle of her own grandeur; she would rather suffer death by slow fire than humiliate her old friends!"

"That sentiment does her honour," replied Sir George, brightening up,—“very great honour indeed.”

"Who says that it does not?" Mrs Cornford said. "I can see through a brick as well as most people, but make no comments. Kitty's old friends will no more trouble her than the mummies in Egypt; and she will no more trouble them than she will trouble—her father's ghost at the foot of the Himalayan Mountains. 'I love you dearly, but you're really too good for this world,' says the spider to the fly before gobbling him up; and that is how Kitty—I mean worldly people do. But, to change the subject, Kitty will never disgrace your daughter, rest assured of that. The beggar who has turned thief won't look at his old friends any more than a duke would."

"It seems to me that the proverb is hardly pertinent," said Sir George.

"Well, we're not beggars, certainly, and Kitty isn't a thief, but it seemed to come in handy just then. When proverbs come in so handy they always offend people."

"Pardon me, I was not offended, madam," Sir George said; "but I have really trespassed too long on your valuable time, and will take my leave."

"You'll have a cup of coffee, won't you?" said Mrs Cornford.

"Indeed, no, I thank you."

"Well, would you like to see a picture that is decently done—for a woman?" she asked.

As Sir George knew something about pictures, and always accepted gratuitous pleasures, he accepted that invitation.

Wonderful indeed is the spell of genius. Providence had rather scantily endowed the poor baronet with the fiery particle called soul: he loved money better than art, and appreciated worldly things beyond ideal beauty. But when Mrs Cornford led him up to her easel, and he saw before him a masterly subject, well conceived, splendidly coloured, and full of pure, healthful, manly sentiment, he forgot the rollicking vulgarity of the place, and the offensive familiarity of the woman, in sincere admiration.

"By George!" he said, "you ought to get a good price for such a picture as that."

"Will you give me two hundred pounds down for it?" cried Mrs Cornford, holding out her hand.

"On my word, that is too little. Do you get no more than that?" asked the baronet.

"Oh! you forget that I'm a woman, and have no R.A. at the end of my name. So you won't buy it," she added, smiling.

"I am no picture-buyer, madam, but I have picture-buying friends to whom I will name the matter."

"Send'em here—send'em all here," Polly said; "a picture to sell can't get too much praise—from the wise or the foolish."

And then Sir George very politely took his leave. He was determined to form no opinion on the matter of Mrs Cornford's disclosures till they had been communicated to Ella.

"A most extraordinary person that," he mused, as he walked back to Sloane Street; "so unpleasantly familiar, and yet evidently intending no harm. It would not be a bad speculation to buy that picture; I'm sure it's worth double. Who would think that such a woman could paint a signboard!"

"What a little prig, to be sure!—but I took him in gloriously about the Himalayan Mountains," said Polly; and she assembled all her friends to laugh with her over the story.

CHAPTER XLIII.

KITTY TAKES COUNSEL OF HERSELF.

IN spite of their affection for each other, in spite of Ella's well-bred self-possession and Kitty's innate tact, the two girls were ill at ease during Sir George's absence. Just a touch of reserve, just a shade of coldness crept into the daily intercourse that had hitherto been so unalloyed and sweet to both; and Arcachon seemed for the time a dreary, monotonous, unbeautiful place. Kitty made superhuman efforts to be merry, since she could not be cheerful. She would sing little serio-comic songs with all the gaiety of a gipsy, would dance an operatic *pas seul*, would caricature anybody and everybody, for Ella's umusement. Poor Ella felt grateful, but could not be amused even by Kitty, so great was her suspense, and so painful the necessity of reserve. "Kitty is nobler than we," was her hourly, almost momentary thought, "and if I lose her, how blank, and unloved, and dreary my life will be!"

"If I lose Ella," thought Kitty, "what beggar in all the world will be so poor, so friendless, so forlorn as I? I am like the prodigal; I cannot work, and to beg I am ashamed."

She felt morally certain that Sir George's departure had something to do with herself. Was he determined to find out the nature of her past inter-

course with Perry? Was he suspicious concerning her career from the beginning? What would he think, how would he act, if he knew all?

At that thought Kitty would walk up and down her room, in a passion of indignation against the Fates for having used her so hardly.

"I have nothing to be ashamed of but my poverty," she thought, with extreme bitterness; "nothing—nothing. Who can accuse me of ever forgetting that I was a woman? When did my pride in my good name for a single instance forsake me? When was I guilty of a light word, or of an immodest action? Ella, who is pure as the angels, is not more pure than I; and yet, because I am poor, such reputation avails nothing. Oh! poverty, poverty! why do you not kill us outright, body and soul, rather than so torture us?"

But if Kitty's mind was in a ferment when she had only suspicion as the base for her uneasiness, what was her condition after reading the following letter from Mrs Cornford?

"PARADISE PLACE, Nov. 10th.

"DEAR MISS GOOD-FOR-NOTHING,

"A little, youngish-oldish, Jack-in-the-box-looking man, with as much hair on his face as would make two or three clothes-brushes, came here yesterday to inquire about you and your belongings. I gave the first thing in the way of a pedigree that came to my mind, and if he took it as true, he must

blame himself for being a fool, and not me for taking him in. 'Treat a donkey like a donkey, or you'll soon see where you are for your pains,' that is my motto, Kitty; and a good one as far as my experience of donkeys goes.

"Well, I told the little wretch all this and much more, and praised you up, as a shopman praises up damaged goods he wants to get rid of. I wasn't going to be the ruin of you, though you have been the ruin of my poor Perry; for blood may be thicker than water, but if a motherless child you have taken care of isn't your relation, who is? And you're my relation still, Kitty; and if ever you want what you never get except from the best of friends, namely, a little money and a little plain speaking, count upon Polly Cornford. Your father was an Irish divine, remember that, and went to India as a missionary, and died there, and is buried at the foot of the Himalayan Mountains; and your mother was the daughter of the younger son of Sir Thomas Mistletoe—remember that, too; and she was disinherited because she married a poor curate. Whatever you do, don't muddle the story.

"Now, didn't I do my best for you? And I said, also, that you were no more like us than a pretty little blue and pink bean that has slipped into a bushel of grey field-pease, or something of the kind—which is true; whether the bean is the best of the lot is another question. But write to us, my dear. 'Good luck divides the best of

friends,' says the dog who has stolen a bone, to his neighbour; but it shan't entirely divide us; and though we don't want your bone, we want to know how it tastes. Is it full of marrow? Is it the best of bones? How long will it last?

"You needn't grudge us this pleasure, for we're not envious, Kitty, only a little inquisitive, as old friends always are. I hope you'll be happy with the grand folks, that's all. Fine feathers, here and there, make a very fine bird, and you'll never let people find out that you are a jay instead of a peacock, I know. Are you quite comfortable in your borrowed finery? Does it really fit? And if it doesn't fit, how does it feel? Well, there's no accounting for tastes, as the devil said when he saw the Scotch people listening to sermons two hours long!

"Good-bye, little daughter of Mammon.

"Yours ever,

"POLLY C.

"P.S.—Oh, dear! I remember now that your father was an English parson; pray don't forget."

Think of what Kitty must have felt as she read this letter; picture, if you can, her rage, her terror, her mortification. Nothing as yet had happened so adverse to her fortunes as this; and as she held the letter in her hand, looking like a ghost, it seemed too horrible to be true.

For a short time the blow paralysed her. She

knew not which way to move so as to prove a friend to herself; if, indeed, any harmless, much less expedient, course of action were possible. Sir George at Paradise Place! Sir George, Mrs Cornford's confidant! Sir George, a witness to the vagabondish, disreputable, unmitigated Bohemia in which she had been reared! As she realised the full import of Mrs Cornford's letter, it seemed to her that the cup of her disaster was full to overflowing, and that her ruin was suddenly and irrevocably accomplished. When Ella came to know all, would she not feel contaminated by the mere touch of her finger-tips? Would she not scorn her for having come to them under false colours? Would she not part from her at once and for all?

And if Ella cast her out now, who was there to take her in? She had wronged Dr Norman past forgiveness; she had wronged Perry past forgiveness; she had felt so securely havened in Ella's affection that she had well-nigh wronged Myra past forgiveness. She could not dig, as she had said, and to beg she was ashamed. She sighed drearily as she glanced round her dainty little room, and said to herself, that whatever ills she could bear she could not bear poverty now. These soft cushions, these smooth-going carriages, these dainty meats and drinks, were as necessary to her as if she had been accustomed to them from infancy.

"Poverty would soon kill me, I think," she said;

„and if it did not, it would make life more hateful to me than death itself. Oh! what shall I do?”

She sat still and pondered; but thought did not help her. She walked up and down the room and railed at Fortune; nor did that help her. At last she wept; and when did not tears help a woman?

Tears lightened her heart and cleared her vision. Having wept, she felt strong enough to make an effort on her own behalf, and to try whether she could not baffle mischance, as she had often baffled it before. Was she not a host in herself? Was she not far-sighted beyond all the far-sighted people she knew?

When she had calmly considered the question in all its bearings, she came to the conclusion that if she could mend matters at once, she could only do so by one means. She must tell Ella the truth, and throw herself upon her generosity. Ella loved her dearly; a sister could hardly love her better; and she was of a most constant, clinging, loyal, fervent nature. Would Ella tolerate the idea of her friend, her darling, her counsellor, going out into the unkind world alone? Would not her affection for once conquer pride?

Kitty was not well versed enough in the hearts of other women to feel sure on this point. She knew how generous men could be when they love; but was the same spirit of sacrifice to be expected of a woman towards her friend? It is true that they were dearer than most friends, and had loved to

style each other 'sister;' their affection had been based on mutual esteem and admiration; their sympathies had drawn them nearer from day to day. Yet Kitty—who judged all women by herself—doubted.

The day on which Mrs Cornford's letter arrived was to be devoted to some acquaintances of Ella's, who were coming from Bordeaux; and thus the critical hour was put off for the present. Kitty bestirred herself on behalf of Ella's guests, as usual, arranged the breakfast-table, planned a charming excursion for the afternoon, helped Françoise to pack cups and saucers for the pic-nic tea, and showed no sign of the form of anxiety burning within till all her work was done. Then she dropped into a chair and sighed a weary little sigh, and put her hand to her heart. Ella was not present, but a little later in the day she noticed her friend's pale looks; and, though she dared not ask the reason of them,—having received an unsatisfactory letter from her father by the same post that had brought Mrs Cornford's, and naturally supposing that Kitty had heard from England also,—she contrived to manifest an extra solicitude. The party consisted of a widow lady and her four daughters—aristocratic, angular, amiable young ladies, who had doubtless been plump and pretty once, but were verging on the sere and yellow—nay, we will not be so impolite, the greenish-yellow leaf. It was a sad spectacle; for these young

ladies had been brought up merely to be ornamental, and though they were now trying to take kindly to the more serious side of things—to interest themselves in hospitals for the sick, scientific studies, and so on—one could see that this philanthropic and scientific alacrity was not spontaneous. And then, though their mamma was a baronet's widow, they were terribly poor; and if aristocratic poverty is not a harrowing thing, what is? Their clothes were flimsy, and threadbare to the last degree; their shoes would not have withstood the first autumnal shower; their umbrellas were more fitted to keep their aristocratic heads cool than dry. It was a consoling thought that they were bound to the south, where people can go with the clothing that would suffice for statues, and take no harm.

“We intend to be so industrious in the Pyrenees,” said the mother, glancing at the daughters. “Madeleine has become quite a botanist, and collects wherever she goes; Fanny paints in water-colours; Janet is the social economist of the family, and visits all the schools and orphanages by the way; and Constance and I are devoted to entomology. We found in Thun last summer the loveliest white snail you ever saw, as big as a mouse, and with the most knowing-looking horns.”

“Indeed!” said Ella; “but I don't like snails at all. I could never call a snail lovely.”

“Wait till you have a hobby, dear Ella, before

you make fun of us," cried Constance. "Hobbies are the greatest boons the gods have provided as a compensation for all the ills which flesh is heir to."

"As if Ella had no hobby," said Lady Gardiner;—"who is without?"

"This is my hobby," answered Ella, laying her hand affectionately on Kitty's arm.

"And what is Miss Silver's hobby?" asked one of the ladies.

"Kitty's hobby," said Ella, very quickly, "is to be good to everybody."

Kitty coloured a little. Was there any satire in Ella's remark? She could hardly believe it, though it sounded more like satire than anything else; but then we know our own hearts so much better than our best friends know them! Kitty and Ella were the very best friends. It was Set Fair on Ella's weather-glass when Kitty was by: it was Rain, Storm, and Much Rain when she was away. Kitty loved in a half humble, half lofty, protective fashion, that made her affection a staff for the gentle, sensitive, suffering Ella to lean on.

And yet how little did these two women read each other's thoughts! How far were they from knowing each other's hearts! On this particular day, for instance, they sat face to face in the same carriage, ate at the same table, called each other by the same sisterly names of endearment, whilst

each had her own painful secret, and still more painful suspicion.

"How much does she guess?" Ella asked herself again and again.

"How much does she know?" was the thought uppermost in Kitty's mind.

And the ladies in the greenish-yellow leaf went into ladylike ecstasies over their several hobbies, and a merry tea was partaken of in the sweet-scented pine-forest, and the somewhat lengthy dinner came to an end, and at last Ella and Kitty found themselves alone.

CHAPTER XLIV.

WHAT KITTY SAID ON HER OWN BEHALF.

THE pine-scented air had never seemed half so sweet as it did that evening; soft breaths of flowers were blown from the garden; the twilight sky wore the colour of lovely opals from east to west, and when they faded, great stars shone about the purple heavens. Kitty looked at the stars and said to her own heart, "Oh! what has my miserable secret to do with a night like this?"

These small domestic tragedies, which seem such trifles to write of, how hard are they to bear!

We hear of nation warring against nation, of awful catastrophes involving the sacrifice of hun-

dreds of fellow-creatures, and set about our daily affairs as if nothing had happened; but if anything has come between us and the person we love best in the world, what are we good for till all is made smooth again? We could almost hide ourselves in some distant country, so heart-sore, heart-sick, wretched are we! These sweet human affections, the best gifts Heaven has provided, must inevitably seem embittered and perplexing to us now and then; and we can no more see the good in such bitterness and perplexity than children can see the good in things created with stings and fangs. But the good will doubtless be revealed one day.

It is easier to talk of painful matters at twilight, and as Ella rested on her sofa, and Kitty sat in her easy-chair opposite, she began in a low voice—

“Ella, I have something to say to you that lies on my heart like a lump of lead. I must get rid of the lump whilst we are alone.”

“Yes, dear,” Ella said, with plaintive resignation. She did not say, “Come close to me and say it, with your hand in mine,” as Kitty had hoped, but hardly expected.

“I take great blame to myself that I did not speak out long ago when we were first thrown together; but I have always been such a coward where my affections are concerned; and I soon grew to care for you more than for all my other friends,” Kitty went on very proudly and calmly; “and you were very fond of me,—were you not?”

"O Kitty! how can you speak as if it were a thing past and done. I shall always care for you more than for any other friend."

"I know that, and I knew it all along, and yet to speak out is to put a barrier of some sort between you and me. It is natural for people to like to be happy. I said I would be happy as long as I could, at any risk, and I have been as happy as I suppose few people ever are. That will be something to remember."

Ella listened, trembling. What could she say? What could she do? She was beginning to suffer as much as Kitty. The hardest thing of all was that they could not have out the story as children have out their quarrels, cheek to cheek and arms entwined. Ella was a child still where her affections were concerned, and she loved to be kissed and petted as children do; Kitty had loved and petted her hitherto, but Kitty seemed getting farther away from her with every word. Poor Ella!

"The difference between your rank and mine ought to have made me frank," Kitty went on, "but we met on grounds of equality, and when two women love each other as sisters, what do they think of rank? I never dreamed in those early days that our friendship would become in time so sweet and enduring a thing. I did not know you. I did not think that a day would come when I should wish to be your hired servant rather than nothing to you, and it has come now with a vengeance. I

would rather be your hired servant, Ella, than reign supreme in a palace; yet I must go—and you cannot, you must not hold me back.”

Ella listened and said not a word. She had never before realised how much Kitty was to her. She took in at a glance all the misery that the loss of such a friend would bring upon her; and yet she listened in silence.

“If I had acted fairly by you, when we first began to think of each other as dear friends, I should have made some such confession as the one I am going to make now, leaving you to act upon it as you think proper,” Kitty said, and forthwith began her confession:—

“Well, I am a social gipsy; born of them, bred among them, made love to by them. We lived like vagabonds on the face of the earth, taking no care for the morrow; feasting one day, starving the next; but we broke no laws except those of custom and comfort. The men were honest, the women were good, and a universal tie of kindness and charity bound them together. It was a merry life that we led in this Bohemia of ours, Ella, and as free from care as the life of the birds in the woods. If one of us wanted a shilling, a coat, or a loaf of bread, there were our neighbours’, ready for us; and towards myself, the goodness was such as I should be wicked to forget. It was not a life of inward, if of outward, vulgarity. We adored pictures, and music, and beautiful things, and often

went without food to get a taste of them. Yet, as I grew to be a woman, I hated the life. I longed for softness and refinement, as other women long for finery and admiration. Perhaps it was because I came of gentle blood—so they told me—and the instinct of respectability was too strong for me. I felt like an alien, and I determined to elevate myself, some day or other, at any cost. I used to sit at home—a very Cinderella among the ashes—thinking, thinking; scheming, scheming. I had no gifts; that was the worst of it. I could act passably, but not well enough to go on the stage; I could sing and play a little, but had no musical instinct in me; I could not draw a line to save my life. My only natural gift seemed the art of acquiring popularity—I ought to say affection. People always liked me better than anybody else. It was as if, wherever I went, I exercised a magnetic influence; and this often without any volition of my own. If we were dunned by some hard-hearted grocer or butcher, I went to him and talked him into waiting for his money a little longer. There was a poor old Pole in our little colony, a teacher of languages, who would go without bread to buy me sweetmeats. If Mrs Cornford's pupils brought little gifts of flowers or fruit, they were always presented to me. When one of them, Laura Norman, asked me to stay at her father's house in the country, and I went, of course Dr Norman, who was a widower of forty-five, fell in love with me; and his son, a

youth of nineteen, fell in love with me too; and I had no more sought their love than I had sought the love of the others at home. In an ill-advised moment I consented to become Dr Norman's wife, and if Myra had not offered me a home with her I should have married him; whether for good or evil I know not—I fancy for evil. You know how entirely Myra leaned upon me and looked up to me. I believe she would have given me the half of her fortune in her generous, impulsive affection; and we were as happy together as two women can be, when the only tie that binds them together is that of helplessness on one side and capability on the other. Myra is a mere child, as you know, and it was not likely that we should have much in common. Then I came to know you, and just when I have grown fonder of you than of all these lovers of mine—I must go. To lose the others pained me chiefly on their account; but to lose you, who have been my companion, my teacher, my ideal, is like going into a strange land, where I should be of no more account than thousands of forlorn emigrants. It is very hard," Kitty said, sorrowfully; "so hard that it leads me to doubt whether things are always ordered for the best," and she broke into a vehement, indignant sob.

Just then Françoise entered with a little lamp, and Kitty saw by the light of it that Ella was crying also. In a moment she was at her friend's side, holding her little hands, calling her by pet names,

and begging her to be comforted in a dozen loving phrases.

"Oh! life is so short. It must not, must not be!" Ella said, at last. "If I am dear to you, are you less dear to me? Stay with us, dear Kitty, at least whilst you are happy."

"How can I stay?" Kitty cried. "Are you not a high-born lady? Am not I a gipsy, a pariah? Ah! you do not yet know all," she added, without looking at her friend's face. "Sir George has seen these old protectors and companions of mine. He will not think I ought to sit down to table with you after that."

"Kitty," Ella said, "now it is my turn to make a confession; and you would never guess how ignoble it is. When I think of my own capabilities of littleness, I hate myself. It was I who instigated papa to act as he has done; I did it with a good intention. I wanted to offer you a home with papa and me, as long as you might find it a happy one; and it seemed as if I had no right to make the offer unless I was quite sure that nothing stood in the way of your future happiness and security."

She leaned forward, so that her head rested on Kitty's shoulder, and added, in a penitent, pathetic voice—

"Why can one's affections never be good and unselfish and unworldly—oh, why?"

"You wished me to stay with you always?" Kitty asked, breathlessly.

"Could anything else so good have happened to us both?" Ella said, with a sad smile. "You don't know how different papa's life and mine have been since you came to us. We were often quite tired of each other's company before."

Kitty's heart beat fast, but she listened in silence. It was very sweet to her to be so praised by Ella.

"Rank does not naturally imply refinement," Ella went on in the same plaintive voice; "you must have seen that for yourself; and littleness of every kind has been the bugbear of my life ever since I was a child. But there is no littleness in you that I could discover, and it breaks my heart to act meanly towards the person I most love and admire—in all the world," she cried, throwing her arms around her friend's neck. "O Kitty! why was I not also born a gipsy—as you call yourself?"

And she laughed and cried, and kissed Kitty as frantically as if that very moment they were going to be separated for ever and ever.

"Think what it would be for me to go back to a life without you! Women like me, who spend their days on the sofa, must live with women for the most part; and how dull they are! Oh, how dull they are! Fancy your poor Ella shut up with Constance Gardiner and her snails!"

The two girls laughed in the middle of their tears.

"Or with Madeleine and her dried plants," Ella went on, wiping her cheeks; "and they are ex-

ceptionally intelligent for the girls of my set, I assure you. There isn't anything like originality amongst them, poor things! Kitty, having fared sumptuously, I can't content myself with the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table. I can't go down from Kitty Silver to the Miss Gardiners."

"But, dear," Kitty said, very thoughtfully and gravely, "if you really care for me so much, there need be no question of pride between you and me. I was too proud to accept Dr Norman's home, since I could not love him; I was too proud to eat of Myra's bread without paying back in such kind as I could; but I care more for you than for both of these, and I will not be proud now. Let me stay with you as your hired servant in the eyes of the world; let me eat at a separate table; let me play the dependant's part—I could do it easily—only let me stay. I *must* stay!"

Ella looked up, radiant with smiles and tears.

"As if I should accept such a sacrifice from you, you dear, generous, high-souled thing!" she cried, fervently. "But now I will tell you what I think it will be wisest for us to do. Having relieved our minds, we can afford to be happy again. Let us be happy for the present, and not take any trouble about the future. You understand what I mean," she said. "I'm determined that the happiness is to last, but I can do nothing till papa comes home. You are as free to act as the winds

of heaven, but a girl living with her father is as dependent upon him as a baby."

"It is easy enough for me to be happy, now that I know how much you care for me," Kitty answered. "There is, after all, some consolation in being a social gipsy; one is liked for one's own sake, and one naturally likes others for the same reason."

Then she rose from her station by the sofa, and began the usual evening amusement of reading aloud as if nothing had happened.

CHAPTER XLV.

ANCHORED.

EVERYTHING went merry as a marriage-bell till Sir George's return, which event naturally changed the course of things. Ella was determined to keep Kitty, and Kitty was determined to stay; but Sir George must be umpire, and he was a very practical person; concerning himself—not as they did, with high feelings and noble sentiments—but with expediency and the material bearings of the question.

He and Ella had a great many talks without coming to any conclusion whatever. Sir George was shocked at Ella's want of prudence and common sense; at her recklessness in money matters; at her wilful opposition to the line of action he

chalked out for her. Nothing could be more lady-like and sensible, he urged, than to show carefulness regarding the disposal of one's income; and Ella seemed determined to dispose of her income as carelessly as if she were a speculator.

"After all, my darling Ella," Sir George said, "I don't think you have adjusted the moral balance of the case as well as I have done. Every value in this world is a relative value; and let us be as fond of Miss Silver as we may, we are only justified in giving her what her gifts and accomplishments would gain for her elsewhere."

"O papa! as if I could think of Kitty in that way."

"You have never studied political economy, my dear, or it would come naturally to you. Society is made up of exchange, and each member is only entitled to give the real value of the thing he obtains. Now, our dear Miss Silver is a noble creature—I don't know another woman like her—but it will be a disadvantage to her through life that she comes of—well—of what class shall I say?—of the people? And in offering her a home under our roof, we are bound to take that fact into consideration."

Ella's heart was swelling with indignation, but she loved her father too well, and was too used to such displays of feeling on his part, to take offence.

She merely said, colouring painfully whilst she spoke—

“Dear papa, we are only concerned with Kitty herself.”

“Oh! my dear, you wouldn’t feel so about it if you had seen what I have seen.”

And as Sir George recalled poor Polly Cornford’s well-intended cordiality, he shrugged his shoulders. “That woman actually asked me to take a glass of Hollands!”

“But, dearest papa, we are not taking Mrs Cornford to live with us. Kitty has of her own accord broken from such of her early connections as she deemed unsuitable; and though she would always help her old friends if in trouble—which only an ungrateful person could refuse to do—she belongs as little to them as you or I.”

“I admit that, my dear.”

“Then we are only arguing in a circle,” Ella continued, “and there is no more to be said.”

Sir George fidgeted a little, as he always did before venturing upon a heterodox sentiment in his daughter’s hearing.

“There is only this to be said: that if we make Miss Silver’s allowance such as you propose, she will be receiving more than half the curates and vicars of England.”

“If you think that I shall be behaving too generously to Kitty, she must go, papa, that is all,” Ella said, coldly and firmly. “I will not accept

the sacrifice of her freedom, her time, and her interests, for such a miserable pittance as you would hardly offer a nursery governess."

"Of course, you must do as you think proper, my dear."

So the matter ended.

Ella was happy; Sir George grew reconciled to the loss of his money; Kitty felt anchored at last.

She said to herself that she had guided the little craft of her destiny well through stormy seas and adverse weather, and that she had cast anchor in a happy haven. Would she ever be tempted to try another voyage? Would she weary of this pleasant port? She thought not. She hoped not. She was a little tired of sitting alone at the helm, and steering hither and thither in quest of good luck. Why could she not rest now?

Of the future she never thought. The life with Sir George and Ella seemed so agreeable and so suited to her that she settled down, for once, seeking nothing better, for once, hoping nothing beyond. Here she had the appliances of wealth, the society of cultivated people, plenty of money for her own uses, plenty of change, amusement, and admiration. Her spirits rose, her eyes grew brighter, her physical and mental powers developed themselves in this new atmosphere of prosperity. She felt as if she could not do enough for Sir George and Ella, for her old friends in Paradise Place, and for the whole world in general. She

sent her poor old protégé, Papa Peter, who, she knew, was now infirm and almost wholly dependent upon Polly Cornford's bounty, a ten-pound note; she sent Mimi, Tommie, and Binnie, each a necklace, and Polly a little gold brooch.

She would fain have showed some kindness to Dr Norman, but knew no way; she did, however, send Christmas gifts to Laura and Prissy, thinking he would be pleased that his children should have a place in her memory still.

To a mind as active as Kitty's, it was infinitely preferable to find herself a member of the Bartelotte household, rather than a guest. Formerly the question had ever been—"Does Miss Silver like this?" Now the question was—"Does Kitty think this quite the best thing for us to do?"

Kitty's opinion, which was always given meekly, and rather as a tentative than as an opinion, generally led the way, and this supremacy could but be pleasant. Kitty, in fact, ruled the household. If the servants pleased Kitty, they pleased everybody. If a plan found favour in Kitty's eyes, Sir George ceased to discuss it with Ella. If Sir George proved fractious in money matters, Kitty had but to talk the matter over with him, and he grew tractable as a lamb.

Kitty, in truth, had found her vocation. She had not to do now, as in Myra's case, with a mind immeasurably inferior to her own, but with minds, if not her equals in some things, at least her su-

periors in others. She had not Ella's education as a lady; she had not Sir George's education as a man of the world; and to both Ella and Sir George she could look up by turns. They admired her for herself alone, and not as poor little Myra had done, for her versatility in things acquired.

It was not necessary for Kitty to shine here by the means of mushroom accomplishments. Mediocrity in ordinary feminine pursuits might well be permitted to one who was so lavishly gifted by nature; and though Ella encouraged her to pursue the study of music, it was for Kitty's sake, not her own, since she only cared for music of the very best kind. Kitty, therefore, could rest on her oars.

She found herself in the happy position of an ambitious woman, who is told that to improve herself any more were but gilding refined gold and painting the lily. "Good heavens!" she would say to herself, and smile, "had I married Dr Norman he would have set me to the study of Greek and transcendental mathematics at least. Had I stayed with Myra, I must have gone on perfecting myself in all sorts of drawingroom accomplishments; had I stayed in Paradise Place, as Perry's wife, I must have learned how to cook the dinner and make a gown. From what miseries have I not escaped!"

She was good enough and clever enough for these new friends of hers. Why should they want her to be perfect? Sir George felt supreme contempt for any woman who openly set her judgment

above his own, and the only weakness of Ella's sweet nature was that she loved to pose as a moral teacher. There was a fund of religious enthusiasm in her mind, nurtured on the works of German theologians and mystics, that could seldom find means of expression, much less sympathy. Sir George's religious notions consisted of going to church, which he always looked upon as a duty owed to society, and of giving subscriptions to clerical objects. The clergy ought to be paid, he used to say nevertheless with relish, according to the Buddhist law: only the eloquent preachers getting clarified butter, honey, and sugar, and the dull and long-winded going off with a bare allowance of paddy. But he sat out the dreariest sermons with equanimity, regarding it as a sort of penance which would make up for short-comings in other respects. Had he been on his dying bed, he would have summoned a priest to administer the last communion, regarding the priest all the while as a very poor creature indeed, and laughing in his sleeve at the idea of having limited his burial fees by testament.

Poor Ella was, therefore, only casting her pearls before swine when quoting some beautiful thought of Jeremy Taylor and Edward Irving to her father. But even theological pearls were not wasted on Kitty. What a lesson on pearls and swine does such a person as Kitty read us! She was always on the look-out for pearls, and grew richer and

plumper every day; whilst we, like the poor stupid swine, content ourselves with the acorns of the field.

As long as Ella would talk, Kitty would listen, till she knew so much about the points at issue between Strauss and Rénan, and the schools of the day, that she might have taken a first-class medal in an examination on modern theology and its teachers.

Examinations were far from Kitty's thoughts, though she liked to learn what Ella wished to teach her. Ella knew that she had no religion, and was sure to insist upon her having a religion one day; but that question was not mooted yet, and Kitty hoped that it might not be mooted for a very long time.

So long as Ella seemed satisfied with the progress of her theological education, it was enough. Ella was not really satisfied, and regarded Kitty as a lost sheep that it was her felicitous destiny to gather to the fold of her orthodoxy at some time or other. For the present she could wait.

There were soon new ties of interest arising between the two girls. It was not like lying on a bed of roses to be the daughter of a man like Sir George Bartelotte, and Kitty was the first friend to whom Ella had confided her domestic discomforts. Hitherto there had ever been a delicate reserve on both sides regarding this matter. Ella would never make comments, and Kitty would be blind and deaf whenever Sir George made himself unpleasant

by interference in effeminate trifles. Now, the veil was dropped on both sides.

"Why should I mind telling you anything?" Ella said—"you are as devoted to papa as if you were his daughter, and cannot help seeing his little faults."

"And do I keep any secrets from you?" Kitty made answer.

So no secrets were kept on either side, and Ella grew doubly patient with her father's whims, having some one always at hand to sympathise, to counsel, or to laugh and cry with her, as the case might be.

Of course it was Kitty's fate to be now and then *désillusionné*, as the French say. Her aspirations after refinement had been a little disappointed at Dr Norman's house and Myra's also; but had not Ella's mother been the granddaughter of an earl, and was not Ella's father a baronet, the cousin of peers of the realm? Surely here, if anywhere, the atmosphere would be composed of aristocratic nitrogen, oxygen, *pur et simple*, totally unalloyed by proletarian elements.

She confessed to herself that Sir George often uttered sentiments, the moral vulgarity of which would have shocked even Polly Cornford. He never violated the rules of grammar; he never used coarse expressions, but the mean little thought was none the less evident, the unmanly or illiberal opinion none the less repulsive.

Ella was perfectly refined; was she more so in thought or deed than the hard-working little pho-

tographers, Vittoria and her sister, or the unsophisticated Laura?

Time was teaching Kitty many things in which she had been hitherto childishly, egregiously ignorant. Amongst others, it was teaching her the pith of that excellent old maxim—All is not gold that glitters.

But then so long as the glitter was there, Kitty did not much concern herself about the gold; the first was enough to make her happy.

At this period of her history, she was very happy; at least she thought so.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE JOURNEY SOUTH.

WITH the first touch of briskness in the air, Ella began to cough; and the physician said she must go farther south. After some discussion Malaga was decided upon, partly because a friend of Sir George's had offered him the loan of a house there, and partly because Ella had never yet set foot on Spanish ground. So the preparations were made, and the journey was accomplished by means of Kitty's and Sir George's combined forces, with wonderful comfort and tolerable economy.

They travelled first-class of course, and took with them a courier, a page, and two maids; which

fact inspired even the phlegmatic Spanish innkeepers with something like awe. Wherever they went the best hotels were selected, Sir George settling the tariff of every expense on arrival. Compared to poor Perry's journey over the same ground a few weeks back, this was like a pompous progress of royal personages. Yet who would not rather have been Perry's companion, and seen with Perry's eyes?

Wherever cathedrals, or picture-galleries, or ruins were to be seen, Kitty went, escorted by Sir George and the courier. Sir George knew a great deal about architecture and antiquities, something also of pictures, and did his best to inform Kitty. But nothing could possibly have been duller, Kitty thought, though she very carefully concealed her sentiments. Sir George saw everything that was to be seen for his money, tired himself and his companion to death rather than let cicerones cheat him of a real, and had not the faintest notion that where he saw dry bones only, other people made the dry bones to live.

When Kitty came home from these excursions she made the dry bones to live, indeed, for Ella's benefit. She had not the fine insight into the innermost soul of beautiful things that Perry, the Bianchis, and even brusque, noisy, talking Polly possessed so largely; but she had a keen sense of outward harmony and perfection, and transcribed her experi-

ences and impressions to Ella with marvellous vivacity and colour.

Wherever they took up their residence for any time, they made use of letters of introduction; and these furnished a little diversion much more in Kitty's way than sight-seeing. Men and women interested her much more than things; she could never see too much of such society as she could see intimately, no matter whether it was composed of the salt of the earth or not.

"How you read people's characters!" Ella would say, half in admiration, half in alarm. "I feel quite afraid of you! I am sure no one has a weakness that you do not discover."

Which was quite true; but the fact need not have rendered Kitty awful in anybody's eyes, since she took no weakness amiss.

At Malaga they settled down for several months, in a prettily-situated villa outside the town. It happened that a great many English and other tourists had flocked thither that season, and Kitty and Ella might have been as gay as they pleased. Sir George always selected foreign society, on principles of economy; it cost a great deal less in the matter of eating and drinking. Ella selected it on aesthetic grounds, finding the ordinary run of foreign tourists more cultivated and polished than English ones. Their guests were mostly French, with a sprinkling of English and Americans; and, as is always the case in small societies abroad,

people saw a great deal of each other. There is very little sight-seeing in Malaga; so that after the first week or two, visitors settled down to such routine as best suited their tastes and habits; in unison, according to the rules of social natural selection, with those acquaintances who best suited them.

Kitty's special gift was that of organising social life, and making it agreeable. No wonder she was so loved and courted, and adored in this weary work-a-day world, where, for the most part, poor everyday human existence is left to itself,—unbeautified and uncared for.

Perfected capacity, however, like genius, entails responsibilities on the possessor, and Kitty soon found her excess of popularity becoming a burden. At Shelley House she had been the adoration of a simple-hearted family only; at Myra's house, the adoration of Myra, and of no one else; at Fontainebleau, the adoration of a very small circle indeed. Here the case was very different. The winter residents at Malaga numbered half a score of families, and though Kitty did not stand on an equal pinnacle of favour with all, she was universally acknowledged to be the leading spirit of the little society. The Gardiners were there, and the versatile Mr Tyrrell, who had been at Fontainebleau, was there, enjoying life as much as ever.

Among new acquaintances, a certain Baron de Fontanié must be mentioned. Kitty had never seen

any one at all like the Baron de Fontanié before. He was not young, and certainly not handsome in the ordinary acception of the world; but he had what goes much farther in the world than good looks—namely, distinguished manners and the quality of worldly-wise amiability, in almost equal proportion with Kitty herself.

He possessed only the ordinary accomplishments of a gentleman—could neither sketch like Mr Tyrrell, nor shoot and hunt like Captain Longley; but he had held a diplomatic appointment at one of the principal courts of Europe, and combined a rare knowledge of the world with what Emerson calls “the happiest way of doing things.”

It was natural that a man like the Baron de Fontanié, who was rich, unmarried, and agreeable, should be sought after in a society of which several were young ladies, and ladies neither young nor old, to whom the fact of his bachelorhood was a pleasant subject to speculate upon. Kitty did not speculate upon it; she was quite satisfied with her lot as she had chosen it just then, and did not want to make an exchange of certainties for uncertainties. The baron found her the most charming woman, and the most attractive companion of any in the place; so, without the least sentimentality on the one side, or coquetry on the other, sprang up a friendship, or rather comradeship, as new as it was delightful to both. This frank liking could not be set down as flirtation by outsiders. When-

ever an excursion was formed, the baron contrived to place himself in the same carriage with Kitty. If a hill were climbed, he proffered his arm to her before any one else had time to do so. As much deference as society permits a man to show to any lady whose mere acquaintance he is, the baron showed Kitty.

Ella, who was as unselfish as a woman can be, delighted to see her friend's life made pleasant by this new element in it. The two girls talked of the baron and of his marked liking for Kitty, with a perfect frankness, and laughed at the foolish little world of Malaga for calling it by any other name.

"Oh! dear," Kitty said one day, "it makes me laugh and cry in a breath to see how one's best friends misunderstand one! Actually, Sir George is angry with me now, and all because of the baron."

"And the Gardiners are in a pet with us both—and all because of the baron!" laughed Ella.

"And Mr Tyrrell is not a bit like himself, and all because of the baron!" echoed Kitty.

"And we shall have to cast our tents and be off and away, and all because of the baron!"

"O Ella!"

Kitty looked so unmistakably aghast that Ella could not forbear smiling a roguish smile.

"Of course we won't leave Malaga, my dear, if"—

She put her arm round her friend, and looked

into her eyes, inquisitively, before finishing her sentence.

"If the baron's friendship for you is likely to become anything more serious, and you are his ally," she said.

"Ella!" Kitty said, in her superior sort of way, "I am no more in love with the baron than I was with Dr Norman; and he is no more in love with me than he is with any one of the Gardiners."

"Don't be too sure of that."

"But I am sure of it. As if a woman of sense couldn't tell whether a man's liking for her was a dangerous liking or no! Now, the baron's liking is a safe liking, and it is very meddlesome of people to concern themselves with it to our mutual discomfort. I hate Bohemia and its ways; but the spirit of liberty that prevailed there had something really good about it, and moral too. It prevented pettiness."

And Miss Kitty held up her handsome head, and looked exceedingly dignified.

"Why should anything like friendship be quite impossible between men and women in respectable society?" she said. "Love is like eating Dead Sea apples; but friendship—a less enticing and far wholesomer fruit—should be freely permitted to all. How seldom one can taste it! There was Dr Norman, whom, as a friend, I love with all my heart; why could he not let matters rest so? There is the

baron, whose acquaintance is very, very pleasant; why may I not have it?"

"Because he is sure to fall in love with you."

"Indeed, and indeed, he will do no such thing."

"Did not Mr Perugino? Did not Dr Norman's son? Did not Dr Norman?"

"And these are but three out of the many men I have known intimately! You don't know the world as I do, Ella. It will always be the shy, homely, helpless Dr Normans, and the poor good-for-nothing Peruginos, who will want me to marry them to the end of the chapter, and not the rich, brilliant Tyrrells, or the polished, aristocratic barons with a dozen decorations. Men of their stamp invariably prefer a different type of women—the angels, in fact; whilst the others fall on their knees before the first strongly-marked feminine character they meet."

"There are exceptions to every rule; and certainly the baron has shown himself very devoted to you."

"Do let us go into the garden, and eat some custard apples, by way of a refreshment," Kitty said, coaxingly; "I feel in such a very bad temper."

And the two girls said no more about the baron that day.

Finding Kitty so sore on the subject, Ella felt afraid to recur to it of her own accord, though sadly anxious to speak the thought uppermost in her mind.

What if Kitty's indignant protest against the gossip of society covered a deep feeling, which she would not bring herself to confess even to her dearest friend? What if Kitty's heart was really touched at last, and she loved the baron?

What if the baron wished to make her his wife? An indescribable sense of fear took possession of Ella's mind, and there rested. Was this sweet new gift of Heaven to be short-lived as the joy of a butterfly's existence on a summer day?

To this friendless, sisterless, motherless girl, Kitty's friendship had come as the return of health to the sick, as an accession of wealth to the poverty-stricken, as the unexpected advent of children to the childless. Kitty seemed to fill the place of friend, sister, mother, all in one; and Ella had rested on her strong affection, thankful to heaven for the boon, and asking no other.

She now realised on what frail tenure her lease of happiness was held. Kitty loved her like a sister, but Kitty was young, clever, beautiful; who so likely to marry in all the world as she?

Again, was not the advantage of this compact of friendship chiefly advantageous to her father and herself?

They gave Kitty the grosser necessities of life—shelter, food, and the wherewithal to be clothed; she gave in return what money cannot purchase, what even affection cannot command—namely, rare gifts of a rare mind, and the wealth of the sweet-

est disposition in the world. Beautiful, winning, adorable Kitty! How should they bear to lose her? How should they pass their lives without her?

Ella pondered on this question during the silent hours of the night, and came to the conclusion that nothing should induce her to act a selfish part towards her friend in this emergency; that anything in the world should be sacrificed rather than Kitty's happiness.

If the baron desired to marry Kitty, and Kitty desired to marry the baron, she would dispose of part of her little property, rather than Kitty should go without some sort of dowry. She would move Heaven and earth rather than put an obstacle in the way of the marriage.

Ella was one woman out of hundreds, for she could have a friend of her own sex and not be jealous.

CHAPTER XLVII.

“THAT CONFOUNDED FRENCHMAN!”

SIR GEORGE'S temper was not improved by the spectacle of the baron sitting at Kitty's feet. When everything went smoothly, his temper could hardly be called angelic; but the baron's frank liking for Kitty, and Kitty's frank liking for the baron, irritated

him to a pitch that would seem in the highest degree unreasonable. If he did not wish himself to pay court to Kitty, what conceivable, or at any rate admissible, objection could he have to any other man paying court to her? Did he consider the baron too good for Kitty, or Kitty too good for the baron? Was he only anxious on Ella's account, foreseeing the desolation that Kitty's marriage would inevitably bring upon her? Was he only anxious on his own account, dreading to lose the society he so much liked and admired?

If none of these motives lay at the bottom of Sir George's strange conduct, how was it to be accounted for? Not an excursion, not a breakfast, not a pic-nic tea, but was spoiled by his captiousness in little things. The party was sure to be arranged too late in the day, or too early; or too many people had been invited; or the wrong place had been fixed upon; or the horses were wretched hacks, and he would not trust his neck to them.

Lady Gardiner used to say, *sotto voce*, to her daughters at the place of meeting, “Poor Sir George is as cross as ever to-day;”—one could tell if he were cross or not in a moment by the sound of his voice, and the baron would say to Kitty under cover of her parasol—

“I could pitch that fractious little animal out of the window with the greatest possible pleasure.”

Whereupon Kitty looked greatly shocked. To think of the father of her friend being called

"*petit animal*" was too terrible, and she scolded the baron in a way that he found extremely delightful. Kitty, moreover, liked Sir George, and had done her utmost to slight him in no way, whilst receiving the pleasant attentions of a man so suited to her in every way as the Baron de Fontanié.

Sir George tried to keep his ill-humour from affecting Ella's enjoyment, but of necessity she felt it more than any one. She loved and respected her father, and to find him making himself ridiculous, grew so intolerable, that at last she spoke out.

"Dear papa," she said, affectionately, "if the worst comes to the worst, and we lose our Kitty, of what use to fret ourselves to death about it? She is not your daughter; she is not my sister; and if she were, we could not expect her to give up a happy marriage for our sakes. Being only our friend, we have no right to expect anything—except her friendship always—and her company as long as she will stay with us."

"You are putting much too fine a point upon it," answered Sir George, with difficulty concealing his impatience. "Miss Silver's engagement with us was made in a business-like way, and it ought so to be kept. It shall so be kept"——

"Papa, dear"——

"Yes, my dear, I know exactly what you will say. You will argue as if every one of us were made up of angelic affection like yourself; but we

are not. Miss Silver is human—I am human—that confounded Frenchman is human"—

Ella burst out laughing.

"The poor baron! But what has he to do with any private arrangements Kitty may have made with us? In the eyes of the world, she is a member of our family."

"My darling, you speak of Kitty Silver as if she were an ordinary girl; but you wholly lose sight of her extraordinary powers of mind, her insight into character, her judgment, her discrimination. Now, do you suppose for a moment, Ella, that that—ahem—I beg your pardon—Frenchman is as blind as a bat?"

Utterly losing the clue of her father's discourse, Ella let him go on, for the life of her unable to restrain a genuine laugh now and then. What an odd figure he must have looked to a stranger, she thought, as she surveyed him from her sofa! He never rested in the same attitude for a moment, and as he waxed more and more wrathful, his face seemed to grow smaller and more monkey-like, his eyes brighter and rounder, whilst his black hair was shaken like the mane of some enraged little animal.

Ella loved her father devotedly, but she wished sometimes in her secret heart that Providence had made him a little more dignified.

"You don't divine my meaning?" he asked, very brusquely.

—"Not in the least, papa."

"That Fontanié is a diplomatist, and has just returned from Berlin, where he has, doubtless, brewed mischief enough. Just think of what a wife like Miss Silver would be worth to him!—oh! he's as deep as Louis Napoleon himself—I know those Frenchmen."

Ella listened with wide open eyes. What will-o'-the-wisp would her father think he had seen next?

"A man like that, my dear," Sir George went on, "doesn't want a rich woman or a titled woman for his wife. He may think himself deucedly lucky—wonderfully lucky, to get a clever woman like Miss Silver without so much as a halfpenny!—or with no more pretensions to a pedigree than an orange-seller picked out of the street."

"Dear papa!"

"Don't be shocked at the comparison. I mean nothing disrespectful towards Miss Silver. But you must see my meaning. Miss Silver, with her brains and her wonderful art of reading character, and the power she involuntarily exercises over everybody with whom she comes in contact, would be worth a dukedom to a man like that—the cat's-paw of some statesman or other, for all we know—the paid intriguer of some German court, the"—

"The poor baron!" cried Ella, laughing in spite of herself. "Do you really think he deserves to be called such hard names, papa?"

"I don't know what he deserves, or what he doesn't deserve," Sir George said, still very wrathful; "but he shall not marry Miss Silver. I tell you, Ella, he shall not. If I have to fight a duel with him, he shall not."

"Perhaps the baron does not wish to marry her, after all," Ella said; "and Kitty is so fond of us and so unselfish, that I believe she would make any sacrifice rather than make us unhappy"—

"She would be most ungrateful if she were not ready to make any sacrifice—most ungrateful—as women generally are."

"Indeed, papa," Ella went on, with a quiet current of displeasure underlying her gentle words. "I don't in the least agree with you there. I should deeply grieve to lose Kitty, but I should rejoice to see her married to a man she really cared for. And to put any obstacle in the way of such a marriage would be little short of wickedness."

"Of course, I don't want to do anything wicked," Sir George said, doggedly. "I've never done anything wicked in my life hitherto that I know of, and I should be sorry to begin at my age. But if that confounded Frenchman goes and makes love to Miss Silver, nothing in the world shall prevent me from kicking him out of the house."

And, suiting the action to the words, Sir George proceeded to kick, from one end of the room to the other, a very harmless-looking sofa-cushion that

happened to lie on the floor; and when he had done the same thing twice over, he walked away, almost as much relieved as if the cushion had been the body of the baron himself.

Ella hardly knew whether to laugh or cry at this new turn of affairs; she was too used to small exhibitions of temper on her father's part to think much of this one, excepting in so far as it related to Kitty.

What if the amount of admiration Kitty received should draw upon her Sir George's dislike?

What if Sir George should set himself wilfully to prevent Kitty's marriage with the baron, provided the baron and Kitty agreed upon marriage?

Ella was sorely puzzled how to act so as to prevent either catastrophe, or any unforeseen plan that might be brewing in her father's mind inimical to Kitty's happiness.

If only the baron would speak out or go away!

She was Kitty's dearest friend; could she speak to the baron? She decided that she could not.

Poor little Ella! She was too young as yet—numbering only twenty summers—and too feeble to deal with these obstinate, perplexing circumstances. As she lay on her sofa, so pale, so blonde, so *mignonne*, as the French would say, she only wanted a golden harp and wings to look like an angel “dressed for heaven;” and one instinctively felt that the harder business of life was very little fitted for her, and that the position of being

Sir George's daughter was not fitted for her at all.

But no matter what a woman may be—a seraph or a virago, a saint or a sinner—she is almost sure to possess the feminine quality of tact; and Ella had managed to keep Sir George's undesirable idiosyncrasies wonderfully in the background hitherto. She could not feel sure of being able to do so now, and the thought was a distressing one. She could bear to lose Kitty, her newly-acquired, highly-cherished treasure—her pearl beyond all price; but she could not bear to have anything cloud their most sweet friendship; and would not Sir George's unpleasant conduct cloud it? If her father persisted in persecuting Kitty, she could be her defender, but she could hardly be her partisan. As she lay thinking these sad thoughts, and sighing to herself, after the manner of women, that the sweetness of life should be so short-lived, in came the Apple of Discord—Kitty's bright, bewitching, indescribable self! Never were two women better contrasted: the one possessed of a magnificent physique, of an elastic character, so adapted to the exigencies of human life as it is, possessed of so many nascent charms and capabilities; the other all delicacy and softness, and almost infantine loveliness and purity of look and temperament, and quite unfitted for intercourse with any but “the élite of humanity,” though the leaven that leaveneth the lump of society with it is but small.

"We have had such a pleasant drive," began Kitty, in a flow of spirits. "I hardly think you would have found it fatiguing. See, I have brought you home a pretty sketch, made on the spot for your album by Mr Tyrrell and the baron"—

The words were fairly on her lips as Sir George entered the room; but no sooner had he heard them than he said, snappishly—

"Always that confounded Frenchman! When you have finished talking about him, Miss Silver, perhaps you will listen to what I have to say."

And with that he slammed the door to very violently, and went away.

"Oh, dear!" said Ella, as soon as he was fairly out of hearing. "What can we do to make poor papa more amiable?"

Kitty sympathised and suggested, but she did not say, "Let us leave Malaga," which step Ella felt in her secret heart to be the only panacea for the evil.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

GOOD NEWS.

It is a question whether the noblest and bravest of us could long support the small vexations that will disturb even the best-ordered life without the stimulus of a pleasant surprise. Wise men and good women can doubtless do a great deal towards

preventing sordid or unworthy elements from spoiling the harmony of daily existence; but who can command those happy accidents upon which we are all so dependent? We learn—ah, how bitterly!—the mirage-like nature of anticipated joy; but happiness that comes to us as unexpectedly as treasure-trove, how good and reviving and blessed it is! We may respect our preachers, but let those who like listen to the best sermon that ever was preached, and give me for my soul's good a sudden piece of welcome news instead!

Whilst poor Ella was pondering upon the numerous vexations cropping up in her daily path in consequence of her father's intractable temper, an unseen force was at work that would for the time turn the lion into a lamb. A snarling terrier turned into a placid parlour cat would be a more fitting simile; but a baronet is a baronet, and must not be taken liberties with, even in jest.

It must be mentioned, then, that Sir George's temper had been of late years tried amongst other things by a lawsuit. This lawsuit was, as usual, an affair of very long standing; so long, indeed, that it had settled itself down in Sir George's life as a sort of chronic ailment or inconvenience to which one submits with a bad grace. He sometimes wished that the matter might never come to an end, so sorely did he dread the idea of defeat. The question was one involving twenty thousand pounds, however; and when news came one mor-

ning that he was master of the field, he hardly knew how to keep his exultation within decorous, much less dignified, bounds.

The two girls were sitting in their pretty summer-house, looking across the orange-trees at the beautiful purple mountains, and talking over their needle-work, very likely of the baron,—only Sir George had no ears just then,—when he rushed in, flourishing a letter over his head, his teeth chattering with excitement, his black hair blown about his eyes, which were like the bright little eyes of a terrier who smells pleasant prey.

“I’ve gained it!—I’ve gained it!” he cried, throwing the letter on the table, and taking it up the next moment, as if it was too precious to be out of his hands. “I’ve gained it!”

Then he laughed, almost a maniacal laugh, kissed Ella, and shook hands with Kitty. When the first preliminaries of congratulations were got through, Kitty, with her usual tact, left father and daughter alone. Sir George looked up, as much as to say, “Oh! what can it matter who hears about a lawsuit that has put twenty thousand pounds in my pocket!”

Ella looked up as much as to say, “As if we had secrets from you.” But Kitty’s tact was never at fault. She was, in truth, an epicure where her friendships were concerned, never accepting immoderately of the good things her adorers offered her, never taking an ell if they offered several

inches. "Custom cannot stale the infinite variety" of a person so rich in gifts and graces, and so temperate in using the tribute paid to them. So Kitty smiled and nodded to her friend; and, pretending that she wanted to write some letters that very minute, left them to their cheerful little tête-à-tête.

"Dear papa!" cried Ella; "what a weight off your mind! I am so glad!"

"But it makes such a difference in our income. In fact, it makes all the difference," Sir George went on, now grown quite calm and collected. "We need not keep away from England all the year round, as if we were dunned—not that I like England, it's growing so abominably democratic; but you should be in London for a season now and then."

"Kitty would no doubt like it," Ella said, reflectively; "and I should like it, for some things." "Or we might go down to Akenholme Park—I want very much to get my books re-catalogued. I shall put up a memorial window to your mother in the church now, Ella; and, oh! my darling, I could die with an easy mind any minute, for you will have enough to live upon!"

Sir George's eyes were actually full of tears just then, but the next moment he was laughing again exultingly.

"It's about the only piece of good luck that ever overtook me in my life," he went on; "isn't it?"

"All my labourers' wives bore them sons, but no boy was ever born to me. Your dear mother died when we were both in the heyday of our youth. In the matter of property, how shamefully did my uncles and aunts treat me! In fact, without wishing to find fault with Providence, I must say I've been all along more hardly used than my neighbours, though I'm a good churchman, and lead a proper sort of life."

"But now," said Ella, affectionately, for she was too used to her father's somewhat pompous show of orthodoxy to be shocked by it, "all will be well with us; and if we are not contented and pleasant, and charitable to our neighbours, there will be no excuse."

The last sentence was uttered very slily, and, as may naturally be supposed, had reference to the baron. The cap fitted.

"I should be charitable enough to people if they minded their own business," Sir George said; "but if that prig of a Frenchman comes dangling after Kitty, I'll pitch him out of the window without the least compunction."

This speech was, however, uttered more in jest than in earnest, and wholly wanted the acrimony of former speeches made to the same purpose.

"Papa, now you have got your cake, we shall expect you to be good, and not to get cross with anybody."

"Don't you think the best thing we can do is to

leave Malaga?" Sir George said, maliciously. "It would serve them both right."

"Both, papa? How can you utter anything half so unpardonable? Kitty has done nothing wrong."

"She hasn't done anything wrong; but the whole thing—the flirtation"—

"O papa!"

"Well, call it what you will; the whole thing has been carried quite far enough to spoil our enjoyment. If I want Miss Silver to write a letter for me—which she says she likes doing—where is she to be found? In the company of the baron. If we plan a pleasant drive, who is favoured with her conversation? The baron. She neglects even you for that confounded Frenchman, and I won't put up with it!"

But Ella went back to the subject of the twenty thousand pounds, and brought out all the salient points of it with so much discretion, that Sir George's heart softened towards the whole world in general, and poor Kitty in particular, and he promised to treat her more leniently in future.

For the few days following Sir George was highly busy in consequence of his newly acquired property, writing letters, making calculations as to investments, and so on. Ella advised him slyly to go to England. Kitty advised him to go too, in her business-like, superior sort of way; but he declared that nothing in the world should induce him to make the journey just then; and the two

girls laughed over his motive in secret. It was plain enough that he preferred to stay in Malaga, and be, in vulgar phraseology, the plague of Kitty's life. But in all other particulars, Sir George was, as we have said, suddenly turned into a lamb. He would chuckle to himself when alone, to think how much everybody wanted him to be gone, and how he did not choose to be gone; and he teased Kitty about her preference for the baron; and he teased the baron about his preference for Kitty, though in a good-tempered, gentlemanlike way, without any of his former acrimony. Under this new influence Malaga became for a time as pleasant as it had first been. When, indeed, did not twenty thousand pounds cause the wilderness to blossom as the rose?

Kitty was treated by her fiery little patron very much as a spoiled child at this epoch. If she was scolded and punished one moment, she was sure to receive sugar-plums the next. One day it was a pretty silk scarf Sir George gave her; another, a Spanish fan; neither of them costly gifts, certainly, but astounding as gifts from him. He used to apologise for this new kind of spasmodic generosity to Ella, by saying that he had never showed his appreciation of Kitty's devotion to her during her illness; and that it was high time to do so now.

One day, when he had been unusually provocative and unusually generous, having presented her

with a pair of Malaga figures in coloured terracotta, of the value of twenty francs, Kitty made a show of deprecation.

"You are really too good, Sir George," she said. "I feel quite ashamed to take so many gifts from you."

"I am sure you deserve them," he answered, rather bluntly.

"Indeed I deserve nothing."

He looked up, with a curious mixture of admiration, curiosity, and dismay.

"There is nothing in the world I would not give you," he said, in an eager undertone. "On my soul, nothing!"

Then, seeing that she blushed and dropped her eyelids, as much disconcerted by the manner as the matter of his speech, he added—

"And I tell you once and for all, that if you marry that confounded Frenchman, I shall be the most miserable beggar on the face of the earth."

He looked at her sharply for a minute, as much as to say, "If that confession does not take you aback, nothing will," and went away.

When she was alone, Kitty closed the door softly, and walked up and down the room, coloring, smiling, almost laughing to herself at this unexpected turn of affairs. So utterly astounded and amused was she, that she could not restrain one or two little ejaculations—ejaculations not perhaps

self-congratulatory, but certainly not expressive of displeasure.

"What next?" she said, as she thought of Sir George being in love with her.

What next, indeed?

CHAPTER XLIX.

AMATEUR CHIROMANCY.

KITTY, of course, kept her own counsel about this little declaration of feeling on Sir George's part; but she did not forget it, and acted very warily during the few days that followed. She came to no conclusion as to the future. She did not say to herself, "Under such circumstances I will do this or that." She did not vex herself with contemplating the probable perplexities that this new turn of affairs must surely bring. She merely smiled and waited, as smiles and waits the contented angler, asking of the Fates—What next?

Her behaviour to her new adorer was admirable. In the society of others it was precisely her ordinary behaviour, not even Ella noticing a difference; but when alone with Sir George, which happened pretty often, she manifested a womanlike, ladylike show of embarrassment, would evade a tête-à-tête, would make a pretext for running away, would, in fact, behave as any modest girl behaves to a man who is more than a friend and not quite a lover.

Sir George found her more bewitching than ever, but he lacked courage to say so, feeling as yet too frightened at his first piece of audacity to venture upon repeating it. Towards the baron Kitty showed the same frank liking, perhaps a little, though a very little, modified; but not sufficiently so as to attract notice. She had all along felt sure that the baron's friendship for her was a safe one, and, alone in the world of Malaga, refused to consider him as a lover; which conduct reflected great credit on Kitty's perception, seeing that time wore on, and the baron's devotion remained stationary.

Matters stood thus, when it happened that a little pic-nic was planned to a convent on the hills; and that the baron, for some cause or other, was prevented from going. The fact of his absence piqued Kitty as much as it exhilarated Sir George.

"I would rather Monsieur Fontanié should not be in love with me," Kitty mused; "but then the comradeship, of which he talks so much, must be neither cold nor hot, or he would join us to-day."

"He thinks he is so sure of her, that he can leave off dancing attendance just when he likes," Sir George thought to himself; "but he may find out that he has made a mistake, the conceited ass!"

Now, the baron was as far from being a conceited ass as any man in the four seas; but if we wish for a correct estimation of ourselves we must

go to our superiors for it, and Sir George was not his superior. Perhaps the baronet would not have been flattered by the baron's equally candid opinion of him—though, in truth, it was far from being very depreciatory. It may be safely affirmed that the faculty of contempt diminishes in proportion as we grow wiser, and the baron had been growing wiser for many years.

Kitty, as has been said, was exceedingly piqued by the baron's absence from the pic-nic, and determined to punish him for his defalcation, when opportunity offered. It is a question whether such a pleasant thing as friendship can long exist between unmarried men and women, even of exceptionally well-balanced characters. Wise though they may be, they cannot unsex themselves, and the man will behave like a lover and the woman like a coquette upon the first semblance of a quarrel.

So Kitty dressed herself in the daintiest summer costume—it always seemed summer-time in Malaga—and started in search of pleasure with the others, feeling just a little mortified at her friend's neglect. Neglect was a novel thing to her, and though she had entreated for it at the hands of Dr Norman and Perry, she did not find the reality pleasant. Certainly, undue admiration is easier to bear than ever so small a slight, she said to herself, and wished to compensate her ill-used lovers for what they had endured from her own cruelty at that very moment. For Kitty was impulsive as a child where

her compassions were concerned; though a cool exercise of judgment was sure to prevail in the end.

People who go to warm climates more for the sake of enjoyment than anything else, are soon driven to the veriest trifles by way of pastime. Scenery, however beautiful, tires in time. Aspects of foreign life grow familiar ere long. Sight-seeing becomes a weariness to the spirit. So the little world of foreigners at Malaga gave its mind to amusement for the most part; and drives, music, novels, dancing, charades, with other mild and irreproachable species of dissipation, filled the hours "from morn till noon, from noon till dewy eve."

On this occasion, something new in the way of recreation was proposed by Lady Gardiner, who could enjoy a *jeu d'esprit* better than any of her daughters, and was always exerting her motherly wiles to light up their melancholy greenish-yellowish leaf with a little sunshine. Lady Gardiner did her best to keep them youthful and to make herself look matronly, but time cannot be coaxed—even by a woman!

"Sit in a circle, all of you," said Lady Gardiner, when the convent had been explored, and the little party were resting under a group of palms, "and you shall have your fortunes told."

"Delightful!" cried Kitty. "I should dearly like to know what my fortune is to be. I always wished that I could read the stars when a child."

Sir George looked at her angrily for a moment, and then softening down, edged to her side, saying—

“Your fortune is sure to be good; but I am not so sure that I was born on a day of auspicious omen. What do you think?”

“You have certainly been most fortunate lately,” Kitty said, with great gaiety, alluding to the twenty thousand pounds; “and very often one piece of happy fortune follows another.”

“Who knows?” said Sir George with emphasis.

“Who knows?” echoed Kitty, looking as innocent as a baby.

“Which of you will consult the oracle first?” asked Lady Gardiner, looking round. “Please bear in mind that I have been properly instructed in chiromancy by a Spanish gipsy, and that if I dole out evil fortune as well as good, it is not my fault.”

“It sounds very awful,” said Mr Tyrrell to Ella, shrugging his shoulders. “I will beg to be excused, Lady Gardiner, being extremely superstitious.”

But Mr Tyrrell was of course compelled to share the common fate, and as Lady Gardiner predicted a great deal of good fortune with a very little bad fortune to every one, no one felt quite doomed. Great merriment ensued upon Sir George being told that he could not do better than follow out his own inclination in a certain matter that lay next his heart—concerning a lady!

Lady Gardiner meant to infer by this, that if Sir George proposed to her daughter, Madeleine, whom he certainly liked, he would be willingly received as her son-in-law. Ella could not control a genuine laugh at her father's expense; not dreaming for a moment that he ever appeared in a marriageable light to anybody—even to the mother of four elderly young ladies! Kitty teased Sir George with the utmost coolness about the prognostics that he seemed to take in such good part; and a certain Mrs Macgregor, a young widow who loved titles as much as Kitty herself, treated the baronet as if he had grown fifteen years younger, and almost handsome, within the space of a few minutes.

The short bright day was drawing to a close as the little party drove homeward, catching glimpses of mountain ranges transformed by the setting sun into miracles of purple and golden glory. Kitty sat by Ella's side, opposite to Sir George and Mr Tyrrell, but wholly unable to enter into the spirit of the latter's enthusiasm. Whilst Mr Tyrrell and Ella talked of palms and sunsets with the eager enjoyment of people who have lived with Nature, and loved her well, Kitty said to herself, feeling half envious, half contemptuous, "Thus could I have enjoyed, and thought, and talked about beautiful things, if the Fates had been more generous, and not compelled me to build up my fortunes unaided and alone."

Sir George said very little during the drive; but

when it came to an end, he asked Kitty whether she would not walk as far as the Consulate with him, and she said she should very much like a little walk at so bewitching an hour of the day.

So they set off, side by side.

"You don't object to a cigar, do you?" asked Sir George, after a considerable silence.

And of course Kitty did not object.

"Will you like to take my arm?" again asked her companion. "You must be a little tired."

And of course Kitty accepted his arm, saying that she was a little tired; adding, that after the long drive, the exercise was most refreshing.

"Don't you think we have had a pleasant day?" Sir George went on.

"Delightful, indeed."

"Though I daresay you were quite affronted, because that ass of a Frenchman chose to stay away?"

"Why should I be affronted?" Kitty said, with a smile.

"If you have really come to the conclusion that the adoration of a fellow like Fontanié is worth exactly thus much," Sir George went on, scattering a thimbleful of cigar-ashes to the winds, "you show more sense than I ever gave a woman credit for."

"Thank you for the compliment," said Kitty, saucily, and stepping out, dropped a bewitching little curtsy.

"But, seriously speaking, if Ella's consent can be obtained, why should you not marry me?"

Kitty was silent.

"You wouldn't object, would you?" asked the baronet, sharply. "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, you know; and a penniless girl, no matter how handsome, can't marry a title and a comfortable home every day."

"I know you do me great honour," Miss Kitty said, slowly—"very great honour indeed. But"—

"Of course there must be a few 'Buts!' I quite expected that."

"I was only going to say that nothing would induce me to marry you merely because you have a title," Kitty went on, with something of offended dignity in her voice. "I am not quite so mercenary as you seem to suppose."

"Oh! I take it for granted that you like me pretty well," answered her lover, coolly. "We have been such capital friends all along, and I'm sure, if ever a man was desperately in love, it is myself! But what about Ella?"

"Dear Ella! she must not be made unhappy, of all others in the world!"

"No, I must sooner give you up than spoil Ella's peace of mind. It would be morally impossible for me to grieve her."

"And I love her so dearly that I would almost give up my life for her sake."

"I know you would," Sir George said, eagerly,

"and she knows it too. Surely she would make a little sacrifice in order to have you always with her."

Kitty, who knew Ella better than her father did, simply because they were both women, was silent.

"Suppose you name it to her?" Sir George added, with considerable uneasiness in his voice. "On my soul, I don't think I could!" And Kitty promised to name it to Ella.

CHAPTER L.

THE SWEETS OF LOVE.

BEFORE Sir George and Kitty parted, they agreed that it would be best to keep their own counsel for a day or two. Sir George had long promised to visit an old military friend of his quartered at Gibraltar, and the bright thought struck him that he might just as well be out of the way whilst the two girls settled his love affair between them! Such a thought would have hardly entered the head of an ordinary lover; but then Sir George was not an ordinary lover. He considered himself to be desperately in love with his daughter's attractive protégée, and felt much elated at the idea of winning so young, devoted, and charming a wife, especially as he was now in a position to marry without injuring Ella's prospects. He did not "compass her with sweet observances," after Dr

Norman's fashion, or woo her as only a born poet, like poor Perry, could. If Kitty felt satisfied, what did it matter? Certainly, to come down from the affection of such men as Dr Norman and Perry to the affection of such men as Sir George, was coming down from figs to thistles, and from grapes to thorns, with a vengeance. Kitty, whatever might be her weaknesses, had the keenest perception of the reality of things, and whilst accepting Sir George's love, valued it exactly for what it was worth. She, moreover, looked into the future, and saw what it would be worth during the years to come.

In the first place, it would bring her a title, and Kitty exulted childishly over the idea of being called Lady Bartelotte. She repeated the name to herself again and again, and wrote it on little scraps of paper—

LADY BARTELOTTE,

and dreamed pleasantly at night of being called "My lady" by Francine and the rest of the servants. Thus much would Sir George's love bring her. And it would bring her, if not wealth—for Sir George was the last person in the world to woo his Danaë in a shower of gold—the appliances of wealth: a train of servants, a well-appointed house to live in—*home* hardly seemed the word to use—a carriage to ride in, fashionable clothes to wear, perhaps even a few jewels.

All these things she had hitherto prized beyond

the most precious gifts of affection; and was she going to undervalue them now when they were offered her for the term of her life?

By no means.

If all went well—that is to say, if Ella could be brought to consent—she should marry Sir George, and make him as good a wife as his heart could desire. She should turn her back upon those sweet foolish fictions of youth, and love, and romance, and try to forget that for her they had ever been. She should take Sir George's gifts in a kindly and not a captious spirit; not asking for more than he had to give, not making herself or her husband miserable, because she could not love him as she knew it was in her nature to love!

During the two or three days that intervened between Sir George's proposal of marriage and his departure for Gibraltar, his behaviour was hardly what could be called dignified. In Ella's presence he conducted himself with so much discretion towards the woman he adored, that no one would have guessed his secret sentiments for an instant. He affected a sort of patronising air to her, which to any one less amiable and long-suffering than Kitty, would have been intolerable; asked her to run and fetch this, to sit down by his side and write that; corrected her faults of pronunciation, flatly quizzed her for such naïve little blunders in etiquette as the most careful and clever persons can hardly help making who have upheaved them-

selves from the proletarian to the patrician strata of society; in fine, whilst intending to blind Ella, and to put his relationship with Kitty 'on a sure and stable footing by a little wholesome discipline, made himself appear as unlike a lover as well could be.

Now, full credit must be given to Sir George for wooing Kitty in this frank and unceremonious manner. He had not forgotten Mrs Cornford and her bottle of Hollands, and felt that, however much he might admire and adore Kitty, it was an act of extraordinary condescension on his part to make her Lady Bartelotte, and that if he began by spoiling her at the outset, there would be no telling what airs she might not take upon herself in the future. She must understand the sacrifice he was making for her sake. These splendid creatures, Sir George mused, who turn a man's brain, have often very strong wills of their own; and if Miss Kitty has a very strong will of her own, which she chooses to keep in the background for the present—well, we shall see who is to be the master!

Sir George was simply endeavouring, therefore, to curb Kitty's ambition, hoping by this means to prevent all misunderstanding in the future. Kitty had much better marry him with her eyes open if she married him at all; and though he felt that to lose her now would disappoint him and enrage him beyond measure, he was determined to make court-

ship a fit preparation for marriage. When alone with her he would permit himself to indulge in tender little looks and speeches that, he thought, must more than compensate for overt castigations and hostilities. He would talk to her in a confidential way about her future manner of living, interlarding his words with "my love" and "my dear," as if they were married already. Once or twice he had attempted to behave in a more lover-like fashion, but Miss Kitty, who was as proud as a peacock where her personal dignity was concerned, had repelled these advances with a charming show of haughtiness, saying—

"You forget, Sir George, that we are not engaged as yet; and though I am the beggar's daughter, and you are King Cophetua, I presume that the beggar's daughter is not to be thought worse of for having a little womanly pride, sir?"

And this little touch of coquetry, prudery—call it what you will—made the baronet swear a hundred secret vows that a girl with so much spirit should be his wife at any cost.

In all other respects Kitty was as meek as if indeed she were the beggar's daughter, and Sir George, King Cophetua. She treated him exactly in the way that some men like to be treated by women, referring to his judgment in everything, anticipating his wishes, hanging upon his looks, paying the homage of a willing slave. What wonder that poor Sir George was intoxicated! He

was continually checking himself in his generous impulses, however, thinking: "I must not—I will not be befooled by her, charming as she is; or there will be no peace for us in the future."

For instance, they were talking, one day, about their probable return to England, and Sir George, who had been extremely fault-finding and captious that morning, mentioned a season in London by way of a compensating sugar-plum.

Kitty's eyes sparkled and her cheeks glowed with pleasure at the bare thought. For a few seconds she could not speak.

A season in London!

As if in a vision, all the delights of such an old, old dream fulfilled passed before her mind. She saw herself, the Cinderella of bygone times, driving through the parks in the full sun-shine of a June afternoon; her equipage flashing by, the dusty, eager foot-passengers looking on; her toilet as elegant as those she was wont to envy when she also had gazed at the gay scene, dusty and on foot; she saw herself, leaning on her husband's arm—he a baronet!—ascending carpeted staircases, and joining crowds of fashionable men and women in brilliantly-lighted reception-rooms; she saw—what, indeed, did she not see during that momentary rapture?

Sir George's voice broke the spell.

"You have too much good sense to care about conventionalities, I am sure," he said; "and of

course we could not do as other people do; but we should see the picture-galleries, and Ella would hear a little good music."

He added, suddenly, "You don't care for gaieties, I hope?"

Upon which Kitty blushed guiltily, and said she did not care much for them.

"Because it is better we should understand each other upon that point without delay," her lover went on. "We could not pretend to fashionable gaieties in any shape, and Ella does not like them; we should be able to stay at Clarges Street, or at Akenholme Park, and be very comfortable with a little economy; but there would be no sort of surplus for conventional extravagances. I must think of the future, and provide for you as well as Ella, in case"—he broke off hesitatingly,—“in case it should be necessary. You will have as comfortable a home as any lady could desire, and you know that I will leave no stone unturned to make you happy. But there is a medium in all things, and if comforts will not satisfy a woman, no amount of luxuries ever will."

"I want no luxuries. You are much too good for me," poor Kitty said, humbly, feeling ready to cry, less overcome by Sir George's goodness than by a feeling of childish disappointment.

"Nonsense!" he said. And not daring to kiss her yet, though sorely tempted to do so, he clasped her hand, and spoke out boldly like a

lover, "I will be as good to you as my means will allow when you are my wife. You are a little fond of me, are you not?"

Of course Kitty was fond of him. Was she not naturally disposed to be fond of those who loved her, and gave her the things in which her soul delighted? He was unlike her former lovers. He had neither Perry's beautiful genius, nor Regy's boyish enthusiasm, nor Dr Norman's quiet dignity; and his love for her was not as the love of these had been. But he was rich, whilst they were poor, and—wanting alike the sweet gifts and graces of youth, and the more solid qualities of a manhood ripe in goodness and wisdom—could win her, because he possessed wealth, and titles, and ancestral lands.

Kitty was far from forgetting the past under these new influences. Sometimes she would drop the book she was reading, and dream a dream. She had heard many an old Greek fairy-tale in her girlhood, had seen many a nymph and god portrayed on canvas or sculptured in marble; and now, in her days of worldly care, and thoughts of other things, these beautiful fancies came back to her, fresher, fairer, more real than ever.

She pictured Perry and herself, both young, both beautiful, and both loving, wandering hand in hand about some enchanted island, where the sunshine, and the youth, and the contentment lasted for ever and ever.

And then Sir George's voice would suddenly break the spell, and the dream of youth, and love, and immortality vanished, as it had come. "It must be all for the best," Kitty consoled herself by saying again and again: "I meant to do Perry no harm; I meant to do no one any harm; but I could not, I dared not enter upon a life that was hateful to me. No amount of self-sacrifice on my part could have enabled me to be happy enough to make others happy under those circumstances."

Poor Kitty's moral notions were, it must be confessed, sadly hazy. She could not see what good women—indeed, most women—perceive by intuition, that where self-sacrifice is a positive duty, one is generally as happy as one could be under any other circumstances, and often more so.

CHAPTER LI.

THE BITTERNESS OF FRIENDSHIP.

SIR GEORGE set off to Gibraltar in high glee.

"Mind and do your best for us both—your very best," were his last words to Kitty, before stepping on board the little steamer that was to carry him away from the field of battle. "Had I been able to do any good, I would have stayed; but I'm much better out of the way."

Kitty smiled to herself as she walked home in the

blazing noontide. What a parody upon love-making was this! and yet it was the only love-making to which she had ever willingly listened! Had she possessed the faculty of humour in equal degree with other faculties, she would have seen, not only the strangeness of Sir George's conduct, but the glaring whimsicality of it. She wished that he were different in many things, but she did not see that his conduct towards herself was as undignified as it was comical.

"After all, it is better he should be away," she mused. "It would be intolerable to me to see a quarrel arise between Ella and her father on my account. I will banish myself, a beggar, to the uttermost ends of the earth rather than make them so miserable."

But the idea of being banished, a beggar, to remote places of the earth, was not a cheerful subject of contemplation to Kitty; whilst that of being Lady Bartelotte, and the mistress of Akenholme Park, was eminently so. She therefore set aside the prospect of martyrdom, fully determined to act the martyr if occasion required, mind you! and indulged in pleasant dreams of future splendour. All splendour is comparative, and to the Cinderella of Paradise Place, the most threadbare, out-at-elbow aristocracy imaginable seemed priceless, and not at all to be compared to the loving, merry poverty of Bohemia.

Whilst sauntering on with the man-servant at

her heels—for English ladies do not walk unattended in Spain—she was overtaken by the Baron de Fontanié.

“I am going up to Sir George’s to pay my respects,” he said. “May I walk with you?”

“Certainly,” Kitty answered, smiling, “though Sir George is not at home.”

“I have to leave Malaga for Paris by this evening’s train,” he went on, without heeding the last part of her speech, “and I wanted to thank you all for your hospitality to me.”

“I am sorry that you have to leave Malaga,” Kitty said, quite naturally.

“Pray don’t be sorry. I am very glad.”

Kitty coloured, and was silent. The baron had always been so amiable, so courteous, so full of consideration for every one’s feelings, especially in small matters, that she could only attribute this sudden savageness of manner to a fit of extreme ill-temper.

“I suppose it happens to everybody to find the accumulated experience of life so unexpectedly hurled at him like Jupiter’s thunderbolt sometimes,” said the baron; then turning to her quickly, he asked—

“Has it happened also to Mademoiselle Silver?”

Kitty smiled.

“Not yet,” she answered, in her frank, innocent way.

“Ah! you are so much younger than I—not

much above half my years: and yet you are a woman, and women live quickly."

"Not all women; and I have lived very little in the world, which makes a difference."

The baron seemed a little disconcerted at Kitty's manner, which was perfectly unembarrassed, easy, and free from sentiment. The fact is, her tact was for once wholly at fault, and she no more knew what was going on in her companion's mind, than he knew what dreams had just before been making her eyes brighter, and her cheeks rosier than usual.

"I will tell you—that is to say, if you care to hear—what has been the accumulated experience of my life on two subjects, or rather, on one subject," the baron went on after a pause. Kitty not replying, he repeated—

"Do you care to hear?"

"Certainly," Miss Kitty said, beginning to blush a little.

"My experience, then, Miss Silver, is that friendship is impossible between a man and woman, who have no stronger feeling for any third person. Am I not worldly-wise, and trained not in one, but a dozen schools of society? Am I not double your years? Am I not a cosmopolitan? Am I not a politician and a diplomatist? But I am a man, and you are a woman! Our friendship was a thing that could not last. *Voilà tout!*"

Kitty had crimsoned to the eyebrows at the be-

ginning of this speech, but was now slowly recovering self-possession.

Was he, too, her lover? He, the elegant, the courtly, the brilliant Baron de Fontanié?

She felt as one in a dream. A hundred fancies, a hundred ambitions, passed across her mind. The hurried leave-taking on the quay, and the secret courtship of the last day or two, seemed as far off as if they had taken place years ago.

"We may meet again, or we may not; but how should that do us either good or harm? I cannot be your lover—I dare not be your friend. The rest doesn't matter—at least to me," he added, "and I have no right to ask whether it matters to you. But pray believe that this friendship of ours seemed the sweetest thing in my life once: and if it has since turned out to be the most bitter, you are wholly free from blame."

They walked on, side by side, in uneasy silence. There appeared no need to say any more; and yet each was waiting for the sound of the other's voice.

When Sir George's villa was within a hundred yards of them, the baron said, very quickly and eagerly—

"If I can at any time serve you, or friends of yours, I entreat you to count on me. It will always give me pleasure to be reminded of the first epoch in our acquaintance, and if I cannot forget the last," he shrugged his shoulders, and added, "what does it matter?"

"Thank you very much," Kitty said. "I may at some future time be very glad to remember your kind promise."

She said this thinking of poor Perry, and wondering whether the baron would not buy pictures of him some day.

"Will you, too, remember the first pleasant days we spent together at Malaga?" he asked.

"Oh! what does it matter?" she answered, echoing his words somewhat bitterly; and then he opened the gate for her, and not a word more was said till they joined Ella.

As soon as she could get away, Kitty stole into a quiet garden-nook, and thought over the events of the last hour. At first there was a smile on her lips and an elation in her whole aspect; but, by and by, the smile faded, and her look became first subdued, and by little and little, almost stern.

She felt very angry with the baron, and did not seek to excuse herself for the feeling. He had undoubtedly done what was upright, and dignified, and manly: but his way of doing it affronted her. It was the man's way of doing a thing, she said to herself—cold, straightforward, unflinching. The woman's way seemed best to her, just a little shilly-shallying, a little sentimental, a little kind. Had the tables been turned, and the verdict of farewell come from her own lips instead of his, how differently it would have been worded! When she was forced to tell painful truths to Dr Norman

and Perry, had she not sweetened them with tenderness, as children's physic is sweetened with sugar? The baron administered his physic without caring how it tasted to her palate, and she owned that it was very bitter. Truth to tell, our poor Kitty saw such a future of commonplaces stretching before her, that she would fain have enjoyed a little romance ere it should have become forbidden fruit for ever.

And her vanity was somewhat hurt. Having said thus much, it surely behoved the baron to say a little more. If he could not be her lover, and dared not be her friend, he should at least have taken the trouble to find out in which light he was most acceptable. His conduct augured—at least to a mind like Kitty's, always too ready to gloss over the unpleasant side of things with plausibilities—hardness as well as coldness. Did he think that she cared for him, or did he not? In the first place it was his duty to be kind; in the second, to have kept his counsel. As it was he had spoken out, relieving his own mind, but undoubtedly disturbing the peace of her own.

She grew very angry as she pondered over the matter. It would have been such a triumph to let Sir George find the baron at her feet on his return! Of course she should have behaved in a firm and proper manner, cleaving to the old love, and not putting off with the new; for Miss Kitty always persuaded herself that she had done the right thing

in the past, and would do the right thing in the future; but such a lesson must have been most salutary to her too confident and easy lover. Sir George knew right well how dearly she loved and prized his title; had not the baron a title, and decorations of half the Courts of Europe besides?

But he had gone, and she determined to drive the mortification of his going from her mind, and give it up to realities only.

They were not all pleasant.

She knew well enough that she could shield herself from Ella's anger; but she felt sure that Ella would be vexed at the onset. What daughter ever approved of her father's marriage? What only daughter ever willingly made way for a stepmother? True, Kitty was determined to be all humility where her rights, as mistress of Sir George's house, were concerned. True, she was firmly resolved to go on as she had begun, sacrificing everything to Ella's slightest wish. But perhaps Ella would object to accept such sacrifices under their new relationship. Ella was the most unselfish being Kitty had ever known; yet she doubted the issue of the forthcoming ordeal.

If Ella welcomed the change that would fix her friend irrevocably by her side, all would be well. The wedding clothes need not occupy much time; the wedding could as easily take place at Malaga as anywhere else; she might become Lady Bartelotte in a few months—why not in a few weeks?

That thought was a salve to her wounded spirit. Whatever happened, she was to be Lady Bartelotte, and when that happy consummation arrived, she should taste of peace, and rest, and the contentment that knows no ambition. There would no longer be any need for her to scheme, and ponder, and weave in loneliness the webs of Fate.

At least, so she assured herself, and, putting on a blithe aspect, went straight to Ella, first to tell her of the baron's strange confession, and the next of her father's offer of marriage. Surely a stranger errand than the last had never been entrusted to any woman!

CHAPTER LII.

HOW KITTY PLEADED FOR HER LOVER.

ELLA heard the first story complacently enough. She was angry with the baron for having ruffled her friend's feelings, and quite agreed with Kitty that in love-making, half measures were inadmissible; and that a man who was not permitted by circumstances to make a proposal of marriage, was certainly not permitted by etiquette to make a declaration of love. But she could not conceal a certain amount of self-congratulation that all imminent danger of losing her darling was over.

"I do wish you to marry one day," she said,

apologetically. "I am not selfish enough to hope for a moment that of all your lovers none shall win you and make you happy. But there is time enough yet, and we are very happy as we are."

"Very happy," Kitty said, and sighed.

Ella looked up anxiously.

"What else has happened?" she asked, laying one little hand on her friend's arm.

"O Ella! you would never guess."

"You are not unhappy? You did not love that man, dearest?" Ella cried, brimful of affectionate concern.

Kitty shook her head.

"You have not made up your mind that you care for Mr Perugino, after all"——

"No—oh, no!"

"The traitorous Tyrrell has not made you an offer?" said Ella, blushing as she spoke, for she and Mr Tyrrell had ever been the best of friends.

Again Kitty shook her head; and at last, being urgently pressed by her friend to confide her secret, she said, with almost a childish expression of dismay——

"Sir George wants me to marry him—if you don't mind."

This piece of information at first affected Ella in a wholly unexpected way. We have heard of earthquakes and other sudden convulsions of nature, or shocks of any kind acting magnetically upon chronic diseases, whether mental or physical;

and such was the effect of Kitty's disclosure upon Ella.

She forgot that since her last severe attack of illness at Arcachon she had never risen from her couch unassisted; she forgot that even moderate laughter was almost sure to bring on a fit of coughing; she forgot everything in comic amazement, jumping from her seat, walking up and down the room laughing the loud enjoying laugh of a robust person.

"Oh, that is delicious!" she cried; and, when her first ebullition of amusement was over, she sat down by Kitty's side and begged to be told all about it.

"But you will be tired. Do let me make you comfortable on the sofa," Kitty urged. Ella, however, persisted in remaining where she was.

"I am too impatient," she said, "and I do believe that papa's proposals to you have cured all my aches and pains for months to come. But we must soon put these romantic ideas out of his head, my dear."

Kitty looked a little shocked at Ella's levity.

"It is no laughing matter, I assure you," she said, with great seriousness. "I suppose it is difficult for you to look upon Sir George in the same light as other people do. But he is no older than Dr Norman, and you saw no absurdity in Dr Norman's attachment for me."

"That is quite another thing," Ella answered, gravely comic. "Dr Norman is not my father."

"But the circumstances were in a measure similar. Dr Norman's eldest son was as old as you are," Kitty continued, "and people fall in love irrespective of circumstances."

"You have not fallen in love with papa, have you?" Ella asked, with another outburst of genuine laughter. "My dear, I adore you, but I couldn't endure a stepmother—I couldn't indeed."

"Do be serious for five minutes," Kitty said, still as grave as a judge.

"I can't be serious where papa's love-affairs are concerned. How can I?" asked Ella. "He is quite unlike other people, and I know him so well,—dear, good, fidgety papa! What glamour have you cast over his eyes to work this mischief?"

"O Ella! as if I ever dreamed that such a thing was going to happen."

"Dear Kitty, I only spoke in jest. It is so much better that we treat the matter as a joke. It is, indeed."

"Sir George would never forgive me if I so treated it," Kitty answered.

Seeing that there was no prospect of coming to any conclusion whilst she persisted in her sportive mood, Ella returned to her sofa, and declared herself penitent, and willing to be good and tractable for the term of Kitty's good pleasure.

"Nothing could have happened so embarrassing,"

Kitty began, "and you will readily believe me when I say, so unexpected. You have seen all along how frank and friendly has been the intercourse between Sir George and myself, and how little I dreamed that it would ever change. But the mischief is done past cure"—

"We won't say so," Ella interposed, cheerfully. "Papa loves me too dearly, and has too much friendship for yourself, to be incapable of making a sacrifice for us. He must see things in the proper light ere very long."

Kitty shook her head.

"Indeed, Ella dear, I speak without exaggeration when I say that the mischief is done past cure." Then she added, with emphasis, "I am sure that Sir George's liking for me is no passing fancy. I am sure that I shall not be able to stay under your roof, unless as Sir George's wife. Would that, for your sake, this were not the truth."

"O Kitty! it cannot, cannot be the truth! I will not, I dare not believe it. We are both in a nightmare, from which we shall wake soon."

Again Kitty shook her head, and this time there was even more of stately sadness and resolution in the gesture than before. Can a mind like Kitty's be swayed by the paltry consideration of rank? Would she sacrifice her freedom, her youth, her beauty, for the scant privileges of being Sir George Bartelotte's wife? Would she consent to give up

so much in return for so little? These were the thoughts that now passed across Ella's mind.

"Putting myself wholly out of the question, would you marry papa?" she asked at length, turning suddenly cold and pale.

"My darling, it is impossible to put you out of the question. If I marry Sir George, I ensure myself the happiness of spending my life with you. If I do not marry him—into such straits has this madness of his brought us—I could not with comfort, with dignity, nay, with decorum, remain in his house."

And then she crossed over, and, kneeling by Ella's side, kissed her pale cheeks and her cold lips. For a time, Ella lay wholly silent, sighing gently, and making no sort of response to Kitty's caresses and tender words. By and by, she asked—

"Did papa know that I was to be told this miserable secret during his absence?"

"Sir George had no courage to tell you himself, and deputed me to do it," Kitty said, blushing a little—as was surely natural—for her lover.

"You could not marry papa?" Ella cried, more impetuously than ever. "It would not be good; it would not be right. A woman should love her husband, at least a little."

"It was my dream, once, to marry a husband whom I should love a great deal; but I suppose all women have those dreams when they are very

young," Kitty made answer, sadly. "How seldom do they come true!"

"To me it seems," Ella said, "that nothing could be more calculated to make you wretched. You know as well as I do what papa's failings are. Could you bear to be tied to him, to be dependent on him, all your life?"

"One cannot have a perfect life, Ella. I would make any sacrifice to have you with me always."

"What if you should find the sacrifice greater than you could bear? If papa should grow hateful to you? O Kitty! next to him, you are the dearest thing I have in the world, and I would rather die than lose you so."

And saying this, Ella cried bitterly, and would not be consoled, though Kitty said a hundred loving things, made a hundred loving protestations. Was not Ella her darling, her more than friend, as her very sister? Were they not unhappy when apart, contented if together? Would not she, Kitty, find any sacrifice light that knit them with a closer tie? Then, finding her passionate pleadings of no use, she reasoned calmly—

"If," she said, "my vanity is touched at the prospect of marrying a man of title and fortune, do you not see that it is just my affection for you prevents such a marriage from being worldly, mercenary—call it what you will? I am sure you do not dream, for a moment, that I would marry Sir George if I did not respect and like him

sincerely, and if I did not love you beyond all my friends."

"Oh! no," Ella said, still crying.

"You must know from my past history," Kitty went on, "that I am the last person in all the world to take upon myself duties that I could not fulfil. Why did I refuse poor Perry—Mr Neeve? Why did I refuse Dr Norman? Why did I forsake Myra? Simply because they wanted more of me than I could give."

"And they were all more fitted to make you happy than papa! O Kitty, I am his daughter, and, though I love him as a daughter should, I warn you solemnly against this marriage. You will not be able to bear the burden you are laying upon your own shoulders."

"For your sake I shall," Kitty said, softly.

"My darling!" Ella continued, in the same passionate strain—"my darling! let this unhappy business divide us now rather than put bitterness in our hearts by and by. Oh, think of what it would be if we ever grew to hate each other!" and again Ella sobbed as if her heart would break.

Kitty pressed her hand, but said never a word.

"I know that you would try to make us both happy, and that you would never think of yourself, or let us see what you suffered. But could I help seeing it—I who love you so entirely? And though you would be the victim, I could not help or com-

fort you. How could I side with you against my father?"

"I think there would be no victim in the case at all," Kitty said, smiling. "I should have you to love me, and I am sure Sir George would always be kind and good; moreover, you would remain the real mistress of your father's house—I never dreamed of usurping your place"—

"O Kitty! it is not that I am troubled about," Ella cried, with almost a moan of pain.

Kitty bent over her, caressing, tearful, bright.

"Let us not talk any more now, dear Ella. It will all come right in time. Sir George may overcome his fancy, or you may overcome your fears. But we will not break our hearts in advance."

And then she persuaded Ella to drive with her, to pay visits, to do a hundred and one pleasant and amusing things. As good fortune would have it, Mr Tyrrell brought up a friend of his that very evening—an artist, laden with a portfolio; and what with sketches, music, and talk, Ella's spirits somewhat revived.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE LULL AFTER THE STORM.

AFTER the storm came a lull.

Seeing Ella so implacably unhappy, Kitty could

not do otherwise than let the question of a marriage between herself and Sir George rest for the present. She had tried argument, she had tried entreaty, she had tried coaxing—all failed; and Kitty, who combined the wisdom of the serpent with the gentleness of the dove, saw that it was not only kind, but expedient, to wait and bide her time.

Meantime, Sir George, having heard from Kitty how matters stood at home, waited a little longer at Gibraltar, and wrote to Ella, proposing a yacht voyage for her and Kitty. His host was about to take his family to Tangiers, Algiers, Constantine, and other interesting places on the African coast, and invited Sir George to join them. Why should not the invitation be accepted? It was always cheap to accept invitations, and generally pleasant. A yacht voyage had been recommended to Ella. A yacht voyage would bridge over the time that should intervene before their arrival in England. A yacht voyage would be sure to please Kitty, because everything pleased her. Ella was to write word by return of post whether she consented to the proposal or no; and in the former case, they must be ready for starting at a day's notice.

"What would you like best to do?" asked Ella of Kitty, after reading aloud her father's proposal.

"I think we had better go," Kitty said, without a moment's hesitation. "It will be amusing, and we all want amusement;" adding, with a sigh, "we can never find Malaga such a happy place again."

"True," Ella answered. "I will write to papa by the next post, and say that we are ready."

"And I will pay our bills, and get our clothes packed," Kitty said, briskly. "I think that this yacht voyage is a veritable piece of good fortune, dear Ella, and that the soft winds of the Mediterranean will blow all our troubles away."

She said this sportively, and, stooping, kissed her friend on the brow. But Ella did not respond to the mood.

"Heaven grant that you may prove a true prophet, dear!" she said, and that was all.

Kitty talked of the new places they were to see, of the benefit Ella was sure to derive from the trip, of their return to England afterwards, of Akenholme Park, and the improvements Ella was to effect there; of everything, indeed, that was pleasant under the sun.

"I know exactly how your room is to be fitted up at Akenholme," she said. "The walls shall be painted by hand—roses on a delicate grey ground picked out with gold, rose-coloured curtains, grey and rose carpet; your little water-colour sketches, Mr Tyrrell's gifts, framed and hung on silver rods; and a white and gold flower-stand in each window."

"I shall not have money enough for such elegances as those," Ella said, drearily; "and if you are not there, I dare say we shall have things much as they are."

"But I shall be there," Kitty said; adding, "for a time, at least. I must see your English home, even if I go away, never to cross the threshold again."

"Do not let us talk of those things," Ella said. "I cannot bear it."

And she gathered her friend to her heart, and sobbed like a child.

This was the only cloud that was permitted to pass over their horizon from the time of Kitty's disclosure to that of departure. Ella persistently refused alike consolation and confidence, and Kitty could not constrain her to either. It was a painful, embarrassed, dreary time to both, all the more that each felt she could have ended it had she willed.

Had Kitty said—

"Do you go for this little trip, and let me stay behind to be fetched by and by, when Sir George has overcome his fancy," all would have been well.

Had Ella said—

"Let it be as papa and you desire; I will make up my mind to be happy," all would have been well too.

Kitty, whose life for the last year or two had been made up of infinitesimal sacrifices, hesitated—nay, recoiled—from making a great sacrifice when called upon to do so. She knew, well enough, that Sir George's affection for Ella, and his satisfaction in her happiness, would have healed

his wound in time; but she did not wish it to heal, and she would not move a finger on Ella's behalf. The conviction made her feel a little self-reproach.

Ella, on the other side, though possessing the most unselfish nature in the world, could not help being selfish now. It was just the one crisis of life that baffled alike her instincts and her convictions. If she let Kitty make herself happy—or rather, miserable—after her own fashion, on whom would the retribution fall heaviest? If she, with apparent amiability and self-immolation, helped on the marriage which was so hateful to her, could she maintain the amiability?—could she act the self-immolation up to the end?

She felt that she could not. She felt that, much as she loved Kitty, she should feel differently towards her, and that without any volition of her own, from the moment she became her father's wife. Kitty, she knew well enough, would never let her suffer vexations. Whilst measuring to the full her friend's capability of endurance, Ella shrank from putting it to such a test. Far more than she doubted Kitty's powers of self-sacrifice, did she dread the limits of her own. Could she submit to become second in her father's house? Could Kitty's affection bear to be translated into such a relationship? Could either of the family trio proposed by Kitty be happy without practising deception towards the others?

Ella was of too noble a nature to doubt the

integrity of her friend's purpose. That Kitty's better judgment was for once wholly at fault—that her fancy had been captivated by the prospect of such an alliance—that just a little vanity leavened the abundance of affection for herself—actuated her in this persistence, Ella readily admitted. More she would not admit.

Kitty might be ambitious; she might have a touch of worldliness in her disposition; she might unfairly appraise the little she would gain by this marriage, and the all she would lose; but she was loyal, and would be loyal to the end.

Poor Ella prepared for the yacht voyage with a heavy heart; though, after the first embarrassment of meeting Sir George was over, matters mended a little. Sir George welcomed her with more than ordinary tenderness, and Ella felt quite touched by his contrite, self-condemning look. Only half a dozen words passed between them on the one subject lying next their hearts.

"Kitty has told you what passed between us before I left," he said, very humbly.

"Yes," she answered, controlling her agitation by a great effort; "and we agreed that it would be better to let things rest as they are for a time."

"Of course, of course," he said, kissing her. "Whatever we do, we won't make you unhappy, darling."

Then matters mended a little; and the cheerful adieux were made to friends ashore, and the pretty

yacht "curtsied to the land," as a poet has said, and away they glided over the bright blue Mediterranean in search of sunshine. Mr Tyrrell had contrived to be one of the invited, and his company added to the hundred and one distractions of Ella's new life. She had never made this sort of sea-trip before. Everything interested her, from the simplest facts of nautical science to the waifs and strays of natural history she picked up by the way. All on board felt naturally interested in one so young, so winning, and so submissive under the burden of constant ill-health and deprivation; so Ella was too much petted, and too well amused, to feel her trouble ever present with her.

Kitty behaved with the utmost discretion and tenderness. No one would have imagined for a moment that anything beyond the merest friendly feeling existed between herself and Sir George; and yet, in the short tête-à-tête that occurred now and then, she consoled, pacified, reassured him. Sir George knew well enough the state of Ella's feelings, but throughout this, to him, too protracted interregnum, he never doubted that the issue of events would be contrary to his wishes.

If Kitty reassured Sir George, she equally reassured Ella; not by saying—This marriage shall for your sake be given up—but by a tacit acquiescence in delay. Ella was not to be made unhappy; Ella was not to become the victim; Ella was to settle the fateful question for them all by and by.

So great, almost passionate, was Kitty's tenderness to her friend in those days, that Ella felt as if the sacrifice required of her was one she ought to make. Who loved her in all the world as Kitty had done? Who cared for her so well? Ella reproached herself every day.

Thus, by a little wary temporising, and a good deal of reticence and sweet temper on Kitty's side, two months passed in at least outward tranquillity, and in something very nearly like inward peace. Kitty dreamed on; Ella never ceased to dread; Sir George hugged his pet ambition none the less; but all said to their secret hearts—It will be well; and went on hoping against hope.

And the pretty little *Undine* glided from port to port, and many cheerful adventures and beautiful sights they saw as they sailed along in that sweet, southern spring-tide, and none more beautiful than that of Algiers, the city of marble palaces flashing across the purple sea. But there was fever in the place, and thus it happened that when poor Perry came hither, burning with the desire to see Kitty once more, he found her gone, without a trace.

CHAPTER LIV.

DR NORMAN SEEKS CONSOLATION.

WHILST Kitty was guiding her little craft so warily across the seas of life, whilst Perry was rushing

madly hither and thither in search of distraction, whilst Myra was forgetting the bitterness of friendship in the amusements of a wedding trip to Paris, whilst Laura's little heart was pining away for news of Perry, what was Dr Norman doing? Dr Norman confessed to himself that disappointment and misfortune had roused him at last from a state of culpable self-indulgence, and that, so far, they were both good. He did not cease to grieve passionately for the loss of Kitty, and, above all, for the loss of faith in her; he did not cease to regret the wreck of his worldly prosperity; but these troubles, having quickened his faculties and stirred up his moral convictions, were wholesome. He reviewed the last few years of his life with pain and shame. During that sad and solitary period, what effort had he made on behalf of his children, of society, of the world? A supreme grief had fallen upon him, in the flower of his age, to which he had succumbed without a struggle. Full of manly contrition and self-reproach, he now set to work to build up his broken fortunes, and make of his life something nobler, better, more fruitful than it once promised to be.

A particular series of scientific investigations had desultorily occupied his time for many years; and lately, by dint of happy induction and indefatigable research, he had arrived at what was certainly a valuable hypothesis, and promised to develop into a discovery for all time.

With the inexhaustible patience of the lover of truth, he now went on his way if not as confident as Columbus, at least as hopeful. Having methodically arranged the result of his experiments in a set of papers, he laid them before the most eminent men of science he knew, and received ample encouragement, both to continue his researches, and to popularise those that were sufficiently advanced.

So, to Prissy's intense delight, Dr Norman, who was already a fellow of several of the learned societies, promised to deliver a series of lectures at the Royal Institution. Of course, Prissy was much too young to have any idea of the real nature of her father's studies and speculations; but she was quite old enough to understand the meaning of fame, and to be ambitious on his behalf. The little maiden jumped at conclusions quickly. At the luncheon-table she heard Dr Norman's friends drop such phrases as these—

“They will be making you fellow of half the scientific societies of Europe, after this, Norman!”

Or—“It is really incumbent upon you to make known such valuable speculations to the world.”

Or—“I always said you would get tired of hiding your head under a bushel.”

And she stored them up in her mind, and dreamed that her papa was a second Sir Isaac Newton, who, from the falling of the apple, discovered the centre of gravity; and that the next thing to happen

was his summons to the Court of the Sovereign, and all sorts of consequent honours and emoluments.

She cut out, from scientific and other journals, every scrap of paper bearing her father's name, and pasted them in an album, which ever after took the place of her once-beloved dolls.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Laura," she would say. "You don't care a bit what papa does, any more than if he were the missionary at Timbuctoo, who was eaten up, and his hat and hymn-book too."

"O Prissy! how can you say such unkind things?" gentle Laura made answer, her eyes filling.

"But it's the truth. Isn't it the truth?" Prissy would urge; and Laura felt she could not honestly say no. She loved her father, but her whole heart and soul were with Perry, Mrs Cornford, Vittoria, and those other dear enthusiastic friends who had made her life so passing sweet for a little space.

This new atmosphere of thoughtful activity and realism as little suited Laura's dreamy nature as the brisk air of mountain tops suits some poor invalid. She would fain have interested herself, as Prissy did, in making experiments with vinegar and a lump of chalk, or in collecting and classifying fossils, or in finding out the component parts of a carrot at the South Kensington Museum; she would fain have understood, when a kindly Norwegian professor gave her and Prissy a little lecture about the lake-dwellers of Switzerland; and have showed

some interest in the numerous topics so vigorously discussed at her father's dinner-table; but she could not force herself to do so. For her the dry bones would never live, and it made her very unhappy to spend her days thus unsympathised with and unsympathising. The worst of it was, that she felt separated for ever from that seductive life of freedom, art, and friendship. As much sternness as it was in Dr Norman's nature to show to any child of his, he had shown towards Laura when she so obstinately opposed his wishes in Paris. From that time to this the name of Mrs Cornford was avoided on both sides; and it seemed to be a tacit understanding that all intercourse with Paradise Place was over. Dr Norman did not say—'stay away.' Laura did not ask—'May I go?' But weeks and months were on, and she lacked courage to moot the question.

All concerning them had become mysterious to her. Whether Mrs Cornford was indeed home again; whether Perry had ever returned from his wanderings; whether she was remembered by him, or purposely banished from recollection, she could not guess. Not a sign came from the old familiar circle of which she had once been a cherished member; and she shivered like the outcast who beholds some happy hearth from the desolation of the streets.

Perhaps most men in such a case would have been less blind than Dr Norman regarding his little

daughter, and would have seen that she was unhappy. But where sympathy does not exist between them, who so slow to comprehend each other as those of the same blood, who eat at the same board from day to day? Dr Norman could not see what right Laura had to be unhappy, and certainly did all in his power to make her life bright and good; he did not understand his child; that was all. Had a transient cloud passed over Prissy's little soul, no mental vision would have been quicker to perceive it than her father's. And yet neither Dr Norman, nor Prissy, nor Laura herself, were to blame for her isolation. These things of daily life, that look so simple, are often sad and complicated beyond human understanding.

Laura and Prissy, on half-holidays, accompanied by the boys, used to take long walks in the Parks and Kensington Gardens; but they never encountered any one from Paradise Place. The fancied resemblance of some passer-by to Perry would often make Laura's cheek flush and heart beat quickly, but the real Perry she never encountered.

One day it chanced that Laura and her little sister were walking along the High Street, when they heard a noisy scampering behind them, and a vociferated cry of—

“Hollo, Laura! it's only us!”

And forthwith Minnie and the little tag-rag and bob-tail set, rushed upon her, kissing her, clutching

her by the arms, demonstrating their joy in a dozen unconventional ways.

"What larks!" cried Miss Minnie. "Don't you wish we were in Paris, though, Laura? I do. We've no one to take us to play now."

"Aunt's so grumpy," broke in Mimi, "we daren't say our souls are our own."

"But we're out on the rampage to-day, and we've been shooting for prizes at an oyster shop. Such a jolly little target, and an oyster for every hit within the blue line," added Tommie, and smacked her lips with great gusto. "Have you got sixpence? and will you come with us and have a try?"

"Oh, no! we can't stay," Laura answered, anxious to get away, and yet dying for a word about Perry. "Is Mrs Cornford well?"

"She's as cross as two sticks—oh, my! Binnie, there goes the policeman who scolded us for jumping over the rails. Yes, you may look at us if you like, old Crusty!" and Miss Tommie returned the calm inspection of her Majesty's guardian of the peace with a gesture of defiance.

"I am afraid we must go," Laura said, growing more and more frightened at Prissy's consternation and comments to come. "Give my love to Mrs Cornford, please."

"It's no use," Mimi said; "Aunty's too cross and glum to care about anybody's love. I'll say I've seen you."

"Is anything the matter?" asked Laura.

"Yes, a great deal is the matter," Mimi answered; "Papa Peter is paralysed, and Aunty has to take care of him."

"And Aunty's last picture didn't sell, though it was such a beauty," added Binnie.

"And we have had an execution in the house—we have!" said Tommie.

"And Perry has never come home, and we don't know what's become of him any more than the fishes at the bottom of the sea," Mimi put in; adding by way of a climax, "that's what puts Aunty out."

Laura's heart was beating fast, but she encountered Prissy's criticising eyes, and for the life of her dared not stay to hear any more.

"Good-bye, good-bye," she said, giving a hand to each. "Tell Mrs Cornford I will write to her. We must go now."

"Let us go a little way with you. I'll walk with her," proposed Binnie, seizing Prissy by the hand, as unconscious of being obnoxious as any little pariah of a dog which takes friendly notice of a fine lady's pet.

But Laura made some incoherent excuse, and hurried away. Prissy burst out into exclamations of surprise ere they were fairly off. Before they were out of earshot, however, a shrill cry reached them from the distance, and looking round, they beheld

Miss Binnie performing pantomimic gestures on the pavement.

"Do come and see us one day," she cried, pitching her voice to its highest key. "There's little bricks."

And Tommie echoed in the same tone—"Little bricks!"

This scene, as may well be imagined, afforded no small amusement to the passers-by; but poor Laura turned scarlet with mortification, and Prissy was horrified beyond measure. Prissy was as practical a little person as could well be, knowing exactly what was the conventional worth of good clothes and good manners; and to be accosted in the public streets by such a vagabond crew seemed terrible to her.

"O Laura!" she said, "how can you like such rude girls?—and they had got on black stockings too, full of holes!"

"They didn't mean any harm," Laura said; "and as to their clothes and manners, we need'nt glorify ourselves because we are not like them. I dare say they are just as good as we are."

And as usual, Laura's Paradise—in other words, Mrs Cornford and her people—proved a bone of contention between the sisters, and Dr Norman had to settle the dispute.

CHAPTER LV.

POLLY CORNFORD PREACHES A SERMON.

LAURA's recital of Mrs Cornford's trouble touched Dr Norman's kind heart. Though he was too deeply engrossed in his work to think much of anything else, he formed one or two hasty plans on her behalf. The first was, that he would ask her to take his little daughters' portraits. But there were two arguments against such an arrangement. He could not afford the portraits, and he did not wish Laura's acquaintance with Mrs Cornford to be renewed. The second was, that he should call upon her and offer such pecuniary services as lay in his power; but from this proceeding he recoiled on further reflection. At last it occurred to him that Laura and Prissy had begged him on many occasions to let them buy a little mirror for their bandbox of a drawing-room; why should not one of poor Mrs Cornford's pictures do as well? Accordingly he called Laura into his room one day and made the proposal. Laura was enchanted. Dr Norman gave her the money forthwith, and she set off in the direction of Fulham, happy as some escaped bird flying back to its native woods.

She knew that she should not see Perry, that the sound of his name was a forbidden fruit to her; but to breathe the air of his old home, to see not one but a hundred things belonging to him, to be

brought into never so slight a contact with the people who loved him, and the places that knew him—this, if anything, seemed happiness to her. She forgot the dreary disenchantment she had experienced in Paris, and all the roystering discomfort of the little household in the Rue de Trévisé, in her great delight. The chirping of the sparrows, and what signs she read of the spring-tide as she walked along—if, indeed, there are signs of spring-tide in London—filled her heart with exhilaration.

The world was a happy place, and she was a happy thing once more.

At Mrs Cornford's house she did not meet with a gracious reception.

"Missus," the little maid-of-all-work answered, "was very cross and could'nt see company."

"And the young ladies?" asked Laura.

"What young ladies?" repeated the maid-of-all-work. "Oh! I suppose you mean Tommie and the rest of 'em? Well, they're at the dyer's, and have been there for a week," speaking of Mrs Cornford's nieces as if they were clothes gone to be dyed.

"But I am sure Mrs Cornford will see me if you tell her my name," Laura said. "I have come on business, and must see her."

Thereupon a door was opened from above, and Mrs Cornford's voice was heard asking of Mary Hann, as the maid-of-all-work was called, "What was the row?"

"Do let me come up just for a minute, dear

Mrs Cornford," Laura said, entreatingly; "I have really something to say."

"Up with you, then; you're like a bad shilling, Laura, always coming back; but even a bad shilling that sticks to you is welcome in this inconstant world," she said, and gave Laura a hearty kiss as they met on the little landing-place.

"Why, how pretty you've grown!" Mrs Cornford added, holding the young girl out at arms length. "Eyes as blue as aquamarine, cheeks as pink as pea-blossoms, dainty little chin fit for Titian to paint! My! give me another kiss. 'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever,' though you haven't a sixpence of your own to keep the devil out of your pocket."

"O Mrs Cornford!" Laura said, holding her hand still, "I am so sorry"——

"'Don't be sorry for my skin, but take care of your own,' says the eel who is caught to the eel in the mud. An ass gets beaten because he behaves like an ass, and not because of his long ears; and if I get into scrapes, who's to blame but myself? But come into my studio. I'm at work with a—model."

Laura followed her friend into the studio—how well she remembered meeting Perry there for the first time!—and naturally walked up to the easel. A very commonplace-looking man, with an unpleasant face, sat attitudinising at one end of the room; but Mrs Cornford begged him to go and smoke

his pipe, and otherwise amuse himself for the present.

"What a very ugly model!" Laura said; "but I see what your picture is—*The Young Prince in the Tower*, and for the gaoler he does very well."

"Oh! the picture is a mere pot-boiler," Mrs Cornford said, with an odd mixture of embarrassment and amusement, "and the man is not a regular model. He—he is staying in the house, and sat to oblige me, that's all."

Laura was far too simple to devine Mrs Cornford's meaning.

"He is not handsome, certainly," she said.

"Ugly trades make ugly tradesmen," Mrs Cornford blurted out; "and gaolers are not handsome, either in pictures or real life. But what is it that you had to say to me?"

Laura told her errand with some hesitation. Papa had given Prissy and herself the money wherewithal to buy a mirror for their tiny drawing-room, and they would so much rather have a little picture of Mrs Cornford's.

"Any little picture," she added, in childish phrase, bringing out her two ten-pound notes.

Mrs Cornford's conduct was thereupon extraordinary. Without saying one word, she took the two ten-pound notes in her hand, and holding them over her head, performed an exhilarated *pas seul* in the middle of the room; then she went downstairs. Laura heard a hurried confabulation with

the so-called model, the street-door slammed, and Mrs Cornford returned, empty-handed and brisk.

"I've got rid of him!" she said, dropping into a chair. "We part the best of friends, but may we never meet again, says I to my gentleman!"

"Has he been making himself disagreeable?" asked little Laura, as much in the dark as ever.

Mrs Cornford burst into a hearty laugh.

"You dear little simpleton! Don't you know that the best Christians make themselves disagreeable when you owe them money? And though I didn't owe him money, he came to look after money I owed other people. But having got rid of the—the model, we'll choose the picture."

"Give us something you can't sell," Laura said; "we shall be delighted to possess any picture of yours."

"Fiddle-de-dee!" Mrs Cornford answered, impatiently. "Do you take me for a thief? When fools don't get their money's worth, what knaves the wise must be. And though you spoke like a little idiot just now, as good a twenty-pounds' worth of brains as you would get elsewhere you shall have out of my studio."

"How nice to possess so many beautiful pictures of one's own!" Laura said, innocently, as canvas after canvas was taken from the wall.

"It isn't nice at all, goosey; and if times had gone well with us artists lately, I should have had a clear studio."

"Oh! I was so sorry your large picture did not sell," Laura said.

"Who told you that?" asked Polly, sharply.

"Binnie, when we met in the street the other day."

"Whew! now I see which way the wind blows," Mrs Cornford said. "If I had been as thriving as a caterpillar in a cabbage, you would'nt have wanted a picture, would you?"

Laura coloured painfully.

"Papa,"——she began, faltering.

"Well, my dear, we won't quarrel about it. A windfall is as good as an apple bought at the market any day. But to think of your daddy concerning himself about me! 'What with the gratitude and the ingratitude of the world, I don't know where I am,' says the donkey to the hay he likes and the cudgel he doesn't. And I can tell you, little Laura, that I've had more to do with the cudgels than the hay lately."

"Poor Mr Petroffsky is paralysed, Binnie said."

"Oh! that's nothing. One just gets him up in the morning, and puts him to bed at night, feeds him as if he were a child, and keeps him warm, and there's an end to it; but it's the way the young ones go on that makes me wonder what the world is coming to! Look at Kitty: I loved her as her own mother ought to have done (but didn't), and how does she behave to me now?"

"Doesn't Kitty write to you?" Laura asked.

"Of course she writes, but I no more value her letters than if they were dishonoured bills. She calls me her dearest Polly, says she loves me, and fills two sheets with all sorts of pretty things. What is all that worth? Not a ha'porth of straw to light a fire with. Oh! how I hate words!"

"Kitty has treated us all badly," Laura said; "but I shall always love her."

"That's where we're all fools alike," Mrs Cornford went on bitterly. "We are like dogs, who love our masters the better when they beat us. I never beat my dogs, and the consequence is they don't care a pin for me."

"Dear Mrs Cornford, you must not say that."

"What's the use of saying the contrary, if it isn't true? Look at my chicks; I've gone hungry that they should be filled before now; and I'd paint signboards rather than let them want, any day; they are twice as fond of their fine-lady aunt, who sees them once or twice a year, and gives them nothing but her old clothes. They pay no heed to what I say—they won't lend a helping hand in the house; if my back is turned, Petroffsky gets no dinner. They wouldn't go to the dyer's and earn sixpence a day now, only I bribed them with a shilling each to begin."

"It's very trying," Laura said.

"Then look at Perry," Mrs Cornford went on; "no one knows how I love that boy! What does he care? He goes on his travels, and lets me wait and wait for news of him, till I could cry my

eyes out with suspense, if I had two pairs of 'em, one for ornament and one for use."

Laura's eyes filled now, partly with concern for Perry, partly out of sympathy for her old friend.

"Dear Mrs Cornford!" she said, kissing her.

"Oh, bother! I'm like the Irishman in the song," she said, putting the little thing away with a sort of bearish good-nature. "'Tis sentiment kills me,' says I. I didn't mean to talk of that boy, only he belongs to the lot, and has served me the worst of all. It isn't the last hair that breaks the camel's back, but the hand that lays it on; and if the others had robbed me, or played worse tricks, I wouldn't have minded, so long as Perry's heart was in the right place."

"Is it so very long since you heard from Mr Perugino?" asked Laura.

"So long that he is either dead, or doesn't trouble his head about us poor fools crying at home. I shouldn't wonder if he has married a Mahometan woman."

"Oh, dear!"

"He can't have Kitty, you know, and when men are disappointed in love, one woman is much the same to them as another. Besides," Mrs Cornford added, by way of physicking Laura's moral nature, and warning her off possible shoals and quicksands of sentiment in the future, "Perry could no more support a wife than he could say the Proverbs of Solomon backwards standing on his head."

A pause followed this speech, and Laura began to think of going; yet she lingered and lingered.

"May I call again if I am passing this way?" she said.

"Come when you like, but go when I please; that is my motto about visitors, Miss Laura. Tell papa if he likes to change the picture at any time, he can do so. I hope you children are good to him."

And then Laura went away, saddened by her visit, yet unspeakably glad to have set foot in her paradise once more. It was a deserted paradise, but a paradise still.

CHAPTER LVI.

PERRY'S WANDERINGS CONTINUED.

MEANTIME, where was Perry?

When he found that the yacht bearing Kitty had flown from Algiers like a bird, none knew whither, his heart was filled with disappointment, bitterness, and dismay. It seemed to him that not only Kitty's thoughts, but instincts also, warred against his peace; and he fancied himself shunned as well as despised. Well, nothing remained but to hate her as he could, and go on his own way! He had tried to ruin himself in Paris, body and soul, by absinthe and bad company, and the experiment

failed. He had tried in Spain to lead the life of a more harmless vagabond, serenading bright eyes, singing *coplas*, and dancing *boleras* at village inns with village beauties, giving his soul to Nature, and his heart to the first pleasure that came in his way; and this experiment had failed also. Now he was determined to let things take their course, without an effort in any direction. He would neither try to sink nor swim, but would let the waves do with him as they would.

Bohemia, like Freemasonry, has its pass-words all the world over, and Perry soon made friends to whose board and purse—when not empty—he was always welcome.

When April came the weather grew burning hot. The Sahel was carpeted with flowers of unspeakable splendour; the Atlas mountains looked faint as a cloud against the warm blue sky; a sirocco made the town like a furnace, save where some fountain bubbled in the court of some dusky mosque. Perry's temperament did not bear heat well, and, after a week's enthusiasm and hard work, he longed to get away. One of his new friends, a writer for the *Moniteur d'Algérie* and other local papers, was deputed to report a celebrated trial coming off at a place called Teniet, in the mountains. Would Monsieur Perugino go with him? He could get there for almost nothing, and a finer sight for an artist than the cedar forest of Teniet was not to be seen in the world.

To cram his clothes into a valise, to get a Napoleon or two on the security of sketches worth twenty pounds, to leave others in his landlady's charge, by way of apology for not paying a month's rent—all this was the work of a few minutes; and then he started, feeling as happy as a bird and no less free. He had neglected to write to poor Polly Cornford lately, from sheer idleness, and he said to himself that he would send her a letter from the cedar forest.

But in this he was reckoning without his host. When he beheld the unutterable majesty of the cedars, whether seen in spring-like sunshine, in clouds of mist, or in snow-storms—for the climate of Teniet varies with magical rapidity—he forgot everything except that he was a genius, and that the sight of beautiful scenery made him obviously happy. Was it any wonder that poor Polly went without her letter from day to day and from week to week?

Meantime, the trial came to an end; three or four Arabs were condemned to death for the murder of colonists, and Perry's friend had to return to Algiers and his newspaper.

Perry had made dozens of sketches, and had finished one small picture, all of which he now entrusted, well-packed, to his friend.

"Don't take them to my lodgings," he said, "or they'll be confiscated by the laundress, the restaurateur, and the Jew who let me have my Moorish scimitar on credit, but ship them straight off to

London." And somehow it happened that the address—Madame Confor, Paradise Place, London, Fulham, Middlesex, Angleterre—was written by the reporter, and not by Perry himself.

When Perry's fit of rapturous enthusiasm and industry was over, love of adventure again took possession of him, and he went hyena-hunting with a party of gay young French officers, miles away in the plain.

Sleeping in tents is delightful to those who love the wondrous sunrises of the South, and do not suffer from ague! Poor Perry was knocked down by malarian fever ere he had seen, much less killed, a hyena, and lay tossing in alternate paroxysms of heat and cold, to the great distress of his kind companions. Each had a little theory of his own about malaria, and practised it upon Perry to the best of his skill. He was dosed with quinine one day, with concoctions of herbs the next—was fomented, plaistered, mesmerised, charmed, and Heaven only knows what; but, in spite of all these infallible remedies, grew no better. Then a carriage was written for, and poor Perry went back to Teniet like a disabled soldier from a campaign. There, thanks to the exquisite mountain air, rational treatment, and good nursing, he began to pick up a little strength and spirit.

All this time Mrs Cornford was looking out for news of Perry, as a mother whose only son is at sea. When she heard the last postman's knock in

the street at night, her heart never stopped beating tumultuously till the sound died away. Then she sat down to the family supper in extreme bitterness of soul, wondering whether, indeed, there was such a thing as constant affection in all the world.

Little Vittoria, now Madame Puig, tried to comfort her old friend with the acquired solemnity of a few months' wife-hood.

"Dearest Polly," she would say, "I know—I feel that Perugino is only somewhat remiss, and that in his heart of hearts he is as true as my Victor. Why, I should believe in my Victor's affection if he were in Algérie, and never wrote to me for a year."

"Proving one's self a fool doesn't prove another person an angel," Mrs Cornford said. "I dare say no harm has happened to the boy, and that he means nothing unkind; but don't attempt to pity me for my bunions till you've got a corn, then we will cry out together—Why did we ever wear tight shoes?"

"I don't think either of us wear tight shoes in that sense," Vittoria said.

"Well, corns don't come of their own accord," Polly answered; "and mine let me have no rest by night or day. I'm not dirty particular where my affections are concerned; I can put up with as many slights and crosses as most people; but there's always one pill we can't swallow, with the best

intentions in the world, and that boy's behaviour is mine."

When Perry's case of drawings arrived, addressed to her in a strange handwriting, Mrs Cornford believed that her boy had fallen ill in Algeria, and had there died.

Things were going a little better with her at this epoch of our history. Vittoria and her husband *Piggie*, as Mrs Cornford affectionately termed him, helped to pay the rent, to look after poor old Petroffsky, and to scold Tommie and her wild crew into something like decent behaviour. One or two friends of Dr Norman's had bought little pictures; her winter's work was flatteringly spoken off by the hanging committee of the Royal Academy; and Vittoria's sisters promised to take Mimi as an apprentice to photography at midsummer. She felt no immediate want of money; she painted better than ever.

But prosperity comes with almost an insupportable bitterness when we cannot share it with the one who is the light of our eyes; and Perry was the light of Polly Cornford's eyes. As a woman weeps for her lover, as a wife weeps for her husband, as a mother weeps for her only son, she wept in secret for him.

And none in the little community felt very hopeful now about Perry's fate. Blue-eyed, fair-haired, fair-complexioned people do not bear tropical heats and disorders very well. Perry, moreover, was

rash to the last degree where his health was concerned, and had never been robust: added to which, the Algerian season had been reported in the newspapers as an exceptionally unfavourable one.

Perry's boon companions, who used to drop in for the pleasure of abusing him, now ceased to inquire whether he had written, and one or two lacked courage to come at all. He was ever the spoiled child of the little community: not the most popular person, like Kitty, but the most beloved. All Bohemia went into mourning, which was none the less real because wanting outward symbols of crape.

Mrs Cornford spoke in parables as much as ever, ate, drank, toiled, and span; but is that sorrow alone real which leads us out of the world to fast and weep and refuse consolation?

It was quite by chance that Laura heard of Mrs Cornford's supposed loss, for she had never found an excuse to visit her again. At her father's dinner-table one evening, the conversation happened to turn on the particular set of artists to which Perry belonged.

"I don't know how it is that, with all their talents, they do so little," said Dr Norman's guest, himself an artist. "Look at Perugino Neeve, who painted 'An English Autumn Eve!' Three years ago I prophesied for that young fellow one of the finest positions among our rising artists; but he has

done nothing since; and I have just heard that he has died of malaria in Algeria."

"I hope that the report may prove a false one," Dr Norman said. "We know something of Mr Neeve and his friends."

And then, after a little more talk of Perry, the subject was dismissed, as if it were not of more than ordinary moment.

Poor Laura had flushed to the brow on hearing such terrible news of Perry, and it was with a great effort that she could maintain anything like composure during the rest of the evening. As soon as she escaped to her own room, she wrote a passionate letter to Mrs Cornford, which was posted that night, entreating to know more particulars of this rumoured calamity.

With what agitation Laura heard the postman's knock next day, it may well be imagined. She could not eat, she could not employ herself—she could only sit by the window, waiting and watching. At length came the following note from Mrs Cornford, written with paint on a scrap of drawing-paper:—

"DEAR LAURA,—Perry has written to nobody. If he is alive, he is a bad boy. If he is dead, of course we shall call him an angel. I should like to have had three bundles of hay to choose from if I had been a donkey. How can I believe that Perry is dead?—or that he is alive? I've done the best for his picture anyhow.—Yours, P. C."

Laura wrote a long letter of condolence to her friend, which Mrs Cornford did not read. There the correspondence ended. The summer came on apace, and still Perry gave no sign.

CHAPTER LVII.

SUCCESSFUL DIPLOMACY.

KITTY started on the yacht voyage determined to marry Sir George Bartelotte; Ella was equally determined not to have her dearest friend for her stepmother. How were these parallel lines to meet? Two months of pleasant distraction had slipped by, and neither Kitty nor Ella had yielded an inch. The obnoxious subject was wholly ignored for the most part, but whenever it came up each felt a transient bitterness towards her friend.

"Kitty says she loves me better than anything in the world," reasoned Ella, "and yet she cannot see how this wretched marriage must come between us. If we were indifferent to each other, there would be no cause for me to raise objection to it."

"Ella is so sweet and unselfish," Kitty thought, "and she cannot understand that I am capable of unselfishness too. I suppose all women, even the angelic ones, are jealous by nature."

Thus they naturally went on misjudging and misinterpreting each other. It was as little likely

that Ella should comprehend Kitty's ambitious eagerness, as that Kitty should comprehend Ella's generous scruples.

Between father and daughter, the subject had been tabooed from the beginning. Once or twice Sir George made a feeble effort on behalf of himself and his bride-elect; but Ella's deprecatory look and word were enough to awe him into immediate silence.

He was always saying to himself—To-day I will speak out, or to-morrow I will constrain Ella to listen; but to-day and to-morrow passed away, and he had not spoken out.

There were more reasons than one why Sir George was so eager to consummate this marriage. In the first place, he was in love with Kitty after a fashion. In the second, it was reasonable to hope that a young wife would bring him an heir. In the third, he had a man's natural wish to bequeath the estates that had come to him from his father to a son of his own. Poor Sir George felt that such a blessing would indeed be a recompence for the crosses that had befallen him, and the upright and Christian career on which he prided himself. The anticipation of it made his heart light and his step elate.

If only Ella would listen!

Ella's uncompromising attitude drove him to Kitty for consolation. It was like a sudden descent from mountain regions of perpetual snow to soft green

meadows, laughing streams and hedgerows full of flowers.

When they were alone Kitty petted Sir George, as only women like Kitty can pet men or women whose liking they covet. She said all sorts of pretty things, that meant little enough, but effected a good deal; for Sir George felt himself younger, more confident, and of more worth in the world, for hours after. She told him, moreover, that nothing short of Ella's persistent opposition should induce her to break the promise she had given him—"Because I should be so wretched away from you now"—she would say with insinuating fondness. Whereupon Sir George would fondly kiss the pretty hand that was never withdrawn, swearing to reward her for such constancy, and to stand by her as long as she lived.

When a young and beautiful woman makes love to a man double her years, he is sure to lose his head, whether he possesses a heart or no; and Sir George soon lost his head under the influence of Kitty's fascination. One day a gale was blowing, which was a lucky gale for Kitty. Excepting Sir George and Kitty, no one could keep his sea-legs, so that they had the deck to themselves, and many a pleasant tête-à-tête. Blessed by the gods are those mortals who know not what it is to suffer from sea-sickness! and Kitty and Sir George felt a little superior to common humanity in being thus exempted from the common fate,

and made a good deal of each other in consequence.

With Kitty leaning on his arm, Kitty looking up into his eyes, Kitty's caressing words sounding in his ears, Sir George became intoxicated. Never before had Kitty allowed him to taste the sweets of courtship; never before had she frankly and fondly talked of the future they were to spend together; never before had she said how dear his affection was to her.

Truth to tell, Kitty's patience was giving way a little. She rebelled equally against Ella's wistful hostility, and against Sir George's long-continued supineness. Such a state of things could not go on for ever. Come what might, she determined to act boldly.

After all this friendly talk, with just a little show of shyness on Kitty's part, by way of tempting Sir George's outspoken admiration, she said, blushing and sighing—

"But of what use for us to build up so many card-houses, which dear Ella is sure to blow down? Most likely the end will be, that I shall leave you as I came, a poor outcast, and never once set foot in Akenholme Park."

"By George, no, no, I say!" exclaimed Sir George. "If I live, you shall be mistress of Akenholme, and who knows but that it may go down to some of my name yet? You will manage things

beautifully, too, for that poor darling girl when anything happens to me"——

"Oh, how can you talk of such cruel things?" Kitty said.

"My dear, I did not mean to be cruel. It is only right to speak of the future. Ella has got plenty of faculty, but she is a little inclined to be over-generous, and, without some friendly guidance, would inevitably cripple her resources. Now, you are the very soul of prudence."

"You think much too highly of me," Kitty began.

"Nonsense. I should be a fool if I did not know what a treasure I had won in you. Why, I do believe you will cost me less as my wife than as Ella's companion," Sir George said, gushingly. "And then the difference to me in comfort!"

"I think I could make you comfortable—I am sure I could," Kitty answered, "if Ella will only let me try."

"She will—she must!" Sir George said. "I have no influence over her whatever, but I am sure she will listen to you."

"She did not listen before."

"Suppose you try once more?" Sir George ventured to suggest.

"I cannot help thinking that the second overtures would come better from yourself," Kitty said, feeling, in truth, hardly courageous enough to fight Sir George's battles with Ella over again.

Sir George was silent, but, by the curious contortion that passed over his features, she saw how unpalatable was the advice.

After a little reflection, he said, briskly—

“I really see no necessity of speaking to Ella any more. She knows well enough what you and I have determined upon. Let us follow our own devices, and take her consent for granted.”

“Would that be quite fair towards Ella?” Kitty asked.

“What can we do that she will consider quite fair?”

“Ah, true.”

“It is only the first step that costs,” Sir George added. “Dear Ella cannot fail to see, by and by, that your marriage with me will be for her own good; and till that time we must bear her vexation as best we can. The sooner all is settled the better, I say.”

This was exactly what Kitty had thought for a long time, but she listened in silence.

“We might as well be married quietly when we get back to Gibraltar or Malaga; don’t you think so?”

“That is for you alone to decide,” Kitty made answer, modestly.

“I decide in favour of the proposition, taking it for granted, of course, that you have no womanish notions about trousseaux and that sort of thing.”

Kitty had very womanish notions about trousseaux

"and that sort of thing," but was too much overcome by her lover's condescending goodness to confess her weakness. Sir George went on—

"You will find me a much more practical person to deal with than Ella, who, I verily believe, would spend every penny she possesses in decking you out with finery. Beauty unadorned is adorned the most, to my thinking; and you always look handsomer than other women, no matter how you dress."

Kitty acknowledged the compliment, though in her sacred heart she prized beyond expression the adornments of the outer woman he seemed to think supererogatory. She was too well satisfied, however, with Sir George's new mode to cavil at minor mortifications, and had, moreover, schooled herself resolutely into an attitude of meekness.

"I have, indeed, won a treasure in this girl," Sir George thought, "who has so taken to heart the teachings of adversity. What other woman would recognise her true position—as she does—to the nicety of a hair?"

And as the rest of the party lay prostrate in their berths, and the sailors were busy, he snatched a kiss from the object of his affections by way of rewarding her for her meekness, and himself for his generous behaviour.

Thus the matter was settled, and Kitty felt sure at last that she should become Lady Bartelotte.

As soon as the weather improved, their companions crept on deck one by one. The first hap-

pened to be Mr Tyrrell, and he was so impressed by the confidential and affectionate tone Sir George and Kitty assumed towards each other, that he could not resist running down-stairs, and imparting his suspicions to the owner of the yacht, Colonel Fellowes. Colonel Fellowes, of course, repeated the story to his wife, and from her it went the round of the ladies, excepting Ella.

A spice of scandal at sea, how good and acceptable it is! Every one felt quite grateful to Sir George and Kitty for breaking the general monotony so kindly. Ella was not slow to interpret the sly looks and signs interchanged by her friends on every side; nor was she less slow to understand Kitty's somewhat artificial though devoted manner towards herself, and Sir George's affected ease and unaffected hilarity. Kitty, moreover, wore a ring of Sir George's giving. There was no need to ask questions. The truth was so plain that those who ran might read.

In Ella's pure heart waged a terrible conflict. She would fain have exonerated Kitty from blame, and loved her as dearly as ever; but some strong spell seemed to hold her back. Perhaps she did love her as dearly as ever; only how terrible are our affections when the leaven of mistrust has leavened the whole lump!

CHAPTER LVIII.

ECONOMY VERSUS LOVE.

BUT Ella could not support her unhappy scruples long. The atmosphere of solitude and mistrust was so unbearable, that she determined to come down from the high level on which Kitty's spirit had once moved in unison with her own, and abide where Kitty willed. She reasoned with herself thus:—"Kitty is surely not to blame if her ideal of life and conduct is less lofty than mine; I am rather to blame for carrying an inborn and nurtured fastidiousness into my affections. She is what she is as much by the force of circumstances as I am myself. We must have patience—God only knows how much!—with those we love."

What Ella suffered in this conflict can hardly be told. To her loving, religious nature, Kitty had come as a sweet pariah from the outer world of sin and suffering, and she had set herself the task of turning the pariah into an angel. Loving Kitty devotedly as she did, she had hitherto borne the moral defects of this superbly endowed, captivating, enthusiastic creature, hoping to see them amended in time. But now what hope was there for Kitty? Was she not selling herself to a title? Was she not forfeiting all that good women hold dear and sacred—the close affection and friendship of married life?

Kitty had said that but for her friend, she would never have promised to marry Sir George; and Ella knew well that she believed such a statement to be true. Would Sir George have had to go away an unaccepted wooer, in any case? Ella doubted. There was only one Kitty in all the world, however, and Ella felt that she could forgive even more at her hands than this. Accordingly, when the two girls were next alone, Ella's icy mood melted, and she clasped her friend's hand, saying tearfully—

"I hope you will be happy in your own way, dear Kitty. If I have been angry that your way is not mine, I am sure you forgive me."

Of course Kitty declared that she had nothing to forgive, and they kissed like children who had quarrelled about a cake. After a great many protestations on Kitty's part of her entire self-abnegation and devotion to Ella in the future—why was it that the loyal Ella made no promises?—the conversation naturally fell upon wedding-clothes, and other topics of the same kind. There is a comic vein running through every tragedy, no matter how dismal it may be; and after the agonies of dismay, suspense, and apprehension described in these later pages, all the comedy of Sir George Bartelotte's engagement to Kitty Silver came out.

Having secured his bride, his whole being seemed concentrated on the economic arrangements of his new household. He was like a miser who has

indulged a whim in buying a pretty tame bird, and begrudges his pet any but the cheapest cage and the commonest food. That Sir George's bird would rebel against its ugly prison and uninviting fare, never once occurred to him. On the contrary he was always chuckling over Kitty's good luck, and congratulating himself for disinterestedly making her the mistress of his house and the partner of his fortunes. He dared not talk to Ella in this strain; but "out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh," and Ella, perforce, heard much that was unpalatable to her.

To his bride elect he was more communicative, and a person less good-natured than Miss Kitty Silver must have resented his prosaic, not to say indelicate way of putting things. For instance, his eye fell by chance one day on an advertisement in the *Times* newspaper, headed *A Trousseau for Twenty Pounds*, which he cut out and brought to Kitty in high glee. After all, a penniless wife was not so very expensive a luxury, if her wants could be kept within reasonable bounds, and a trousseau for twenty pounds was certainly reasonable!

"What is your opinion?" he asked of Kitty, as her eye ran over the advertisement.

"It would be as well to have samples," said Miss Kitty artfully, determined not to displease her lover, and not to have the trousseau for twenty pounds.

"That is an excellent idea. Ah! you will not be imposed upon, I see. If Ella were only like

you! but don't say a word to her about this advertisement, for she would think me much too miserly and interfering. And what about your allowance in the future?"

"That is for you to determine," Kitty answered.

"Nonsense! What can a man know about the price of ladies' clothes? I only know that I have heard my poor mother say, she and her five sisters had to dress upon thirty pounds a year each; and they were of the very best blood in England."

Kitty cast down her eyes very meekly.

"If I had only myself to consider, I could dress upon almost any sum," she said: "but, as your wife, I must keep up a certain appearance."

"Oh! these women, these women!" sighed Sir George Bartelotte, "how they befool us with their handsome eyes and insinuating ways!" Then he waited for what Kitty should say, quaking with fear, and determined at any cost to hold his own.

"Pray understand that I wish to avoid meanness on the one hand as well as indiscretion on the other," he said, at last growing impatient. "Tell me in plain English what 'a certain appearance' means in L. S. D.?"

Kitty still paused irresolute.

"Would a hundred pounds a year hit the mark, eh?" asked her lover, eagerly. "If a hundred pounds isn't liberal for a poor devil like myself, I don't know what is."

"O, Sir George!" Kitty said, smiling sweetly;

"as if the beggar-maid did not accept whatever King Cophetua chose to bestow upon her, and be thankful!"

"But it is better to be bussiness-like and know where we are. I always like to know where I am in money matters," said the bridegroom elect, eagerly. "Can you dress like a lady, and keep your temper on an allowance of a hundred pounds a year?"

Kitty burst out laughing, and laying one little hand on Sir George's arm, looked up comically and caressingly into his face.

"I should make a point of being good-tempered," she answered, "but I can't answer for the other. You see, it takes twice as much stuff to make me a gown as it does most women—I am so tall, so unfortunately tall," she repeated, rearing her neck and surveying herself from head to foot with a very pardonable amount of satisfaction.

This little bit of coquetry so fascinated Sir George, that he committed himself to an ebullition of generosity on the spot.

"On my soul," he said, "I can refuse you nothing. Well, then, let us say a hundred and fifty. That will do, won't it?"

And poor Kitty, whose ambitions had aimed much higher, felt compelled to say Yes, and look delighted. How often in the day was she obliged to say Yes, and look delighted, when her inmost heart was full of rebellion!

The matter of allowance being settled to Sir George's entire satisfaction, another no less important filled his mind. Since the fact of his engagement to Kitty had become an accepted one, she had assumed a sort of half-playful, half-serious, wife-like manner towards him, that he found inexpressibly bewitching. If only bewitching things did not interfere with one's purse!

For instance, no sooner was Kitty put in the sort of authority over him which the position of affianced wife implies, than she began to scold and tease him about his shabby clothes. She attached that overweening importance to appearances which people of inferior or uncertain breeding are sure to do, and thought it an affair of exceeding importance whether or not Sir George wore a threadbare coat, or a hat that cost less than his neighbour's. Of course, it flattered her elderly lover mightily to be told that he looked well in such and such a dress, and ill in another; but what Kitty found becoming was sure to cost the most money, and love *versus* economy waged fierce war in the baronet's heart.

Had he kept his own counsel, all would have been well; but he was so anxious to approve himself generous in the eyes of the world, that his meanness became more apparent than ever. First he went to Mr Tyrrell for advice, then to Lady Gardiner, and so on, making the complete round of his acquaintance, till soon not a creature on board but knew what was passing in his mind.

"That dear girl," he said once to Lady Gardiner, "has the most astounding capacity of any woman I ever knew. Between ourselves, few young ladies would realise her position as she does; for no matter how charming and handsome a penniless girl may be, the man who marries her makes a sacrifice."

"Under some circumstances," said Lady Gardiner, smiling. She bore Kitty no grudge for having superseded her daughter Constance, and thought it a good opportunity to take down the baronet's vanity.

"Exactly," Sir George replied; "and devoted as I am to dear Ella's friend, I can but feel that the sacrifice entailed upon me is enormous. Miss Silver has not a penny—absolutely not a penny!"

"O, Sir George! what is money in comparison to her many gifts and sweet temper?"

It was not to be expected of Lady Gardiner, the mother of fading unmarried daughters, to add—"her beauty."

"True; but the predicament in which I find myself is most trying to a man's judgment. How can I behave so as to prove my devotion to Kitty, and at the same time avoid parsimony and lavishness? Now, if you were to give my dear Kitty a little motherly advice, I should be more grateful than I can tell you."

"But it seems to me that she is too sensible to need any counsel of mine."

"She has certainly showed admirable discretion in dealing with the question of our domestic arrangements hitherto; but the misgiving crosses my mind whether she may not sometimes think me over-cautious in money matters. I am a poor man, Lady Gardiner—a very poor man; and it is my earnest wish to prevent Kitty from feeling any disappointment in the future. I wish you would enlighten her mind as to the possibility of baronets being poor as well as artists and authors, and the people she has lived among."

"I must think your poverty is a pet bugbear of your own, dear Sir George," Lady Gardiner answered, incredulously; "but I will pour any amount of doleful tales into Kitty's ears about out-of-elbow aristocracy, if you like."

"Indeed, you are wrong," cried Sir George; then with an expression of alarm—"I am as poor as any church mouse going; and if it were not for Ella's sake—and another consideration equally weighty—ahem—I would never have permitted myself to dream of marrying again. Pray do not inoculate Kitty with such notions."

"Did I not promise to conjugate the verb—*To want money*—in all its moods and tenses for Miss Silver's benefit?" asked Lady Gardiner, saucily. "I'm not good at grammar, but I know that conjugation by heart."

And then she began—"To want money."

"Very active verb indeed—governing all cases

of personal pronouns; declined as much as possible:—

I want money,

Thou wantest money,

He wants money."

Sir George interrupted her a little pettishly, thinking her conduct rather flippant.

"It would be more to the purpose if you could persuade Kitty that a lady's dress needn't cost more than a hundred pounds a year!" he said. "She has made me promise to allow her half as much again, but I am convinced that it is an extravagance!"

Of course this story went the round of the ladies, and reached the ears of one or two of the men. The former mostly blamed Kitty, the latter pitied her. But Kitty did not as yet pity herself.

CHAPTER LIX.

"THIS, MY SON, WAS LOST AND IS FOUND."

"THERE is always one pill you cannot swallow," was a favourite proverb of Mrs Cornford's, and it applied to herself with full force throughout the long summer of suspense that followed her unlucky spring. For the fresh green leaves of the Kensington Gardens grew brown and sere, and the tide of fashionable life was slowly ebbing under the glare of a July sun, and the Fulham fields were covered

with clouds of heat and dust; yet Perry gave no sign. Mrs Cornford had swallowed a great many bitter pills during the period of her lifetime with a tolerably good grace. She had been hardly used by an indifferent husband, had been imposed upon by the shiftless and shameless of her kith and kin, and trodden under foot by such of them as were doing well in the world; she had experienced enough and to spare of the ills of poverty; but kindness of heart and abundance of natural spirits had never once abandoned her. "He who can't kill a flea isn't worth a flea," she would say, in allusion to all minor troubles, and would console herself for great ones by a string of aphorisms, such as—When I've the making of the world, says the shrimp to the shrimper, you shall be I and I'll be you; but till then, eat me, and obey the laws of nature.

Or—What am I that I should escape a licking? says every right-minded donkey.

Or—Are not our duns, debtors, and creditors men and brethren?

This latter speech had especial reference to the friends who borrowed money of her, and the tax collector she could not pay.

Poor Polly had done her very best for Perry's sketches. One finished picture of great genius, representing the majestic Cedar Forest in a snow-storm, was sold before it appeared on the walls of

the Academy; the others were to fill a screen of a Winter Exhibition.

Perry's picture attracted all the more interest because it was rumoured that the promising young artist would never exhibit again. The report of his supposed death in Algeria had got about; fashionable ladies stopped a few seconds longer before the picture than they would otherwise have done, and said, sighing, "How sad!" and real judges of art monopolised it, and bent over it eagerly, criticising, admiring, deploring.

Pretty Laura's heart leaped on reading from the catalogue the words—*Cedar Forest of Teniet-el-Haad, Algeria. Perugino Neeve*; and Dr Norman must have noticed her changing colour, but for his interest in poor Perry's picture. Laura, leaning on his arm, answered mechanically to the discriminating remarks he made expressly for her benefit. The thought of Perry absorbed her to the exclusion of everything else; and when she looked at his work, the artist's living self seemed to stand before her, animated, beautiful, beloved, as of old. Only to see him once again—once again! Laura sighed heart-brokenly.

As the summer wore on, Dr Norman carried off his children to Switzerland, where they were joined by Regy, their German student, and all—excepting Laura—spent a happy time.

They reached home in October; the very next day Laura walked to Fulham. The aspect of Pa-

radise Place had never before been so dreary, to her thinking. There were dirty little boxes of faded mignonette in the windows; dead geraniums and stocks filled the gardens; stray cats of lean exterior wandered about; a miserable little child was wheeling a perambulator, holding a miserable little baby, up and down the pavement, a cart-load of very shabby furniture was being unpacked before one door; a melancholy monkey was performing tricks in a dingy red jacket before another, without any audience excepting the child, the baby, and the lean cats before mentioned. A heavy rain had begun to fall, but the monkey went on all the same, and the audience seemed not to mind it.

The door was opened by Mrs Cornford herself, looking a little older, a little careworn, but as genial as ever.

"Who would have thought of seeing you?" says the devil to the parson; "but you might go farther and fare worse," she said, kissing the young girl. "Come in and have some dinner with me. I've got a dish of tripe just in hot from the baker's, and must eat it as fast as I can without killing myself, and be off to the city."

It was barely twelve o'clock, and Laura's better-bred palate said "No" to this invitation; but Mrs Cornford made her sit down for company's sake, and, having sat down, she felt compelled to eat.

"Fetch an extra half-pint of beer, Mary Hann,"

said Mrs Cornford, giving the girl some halfpence; "and be quick about it, for you must carry up Mr 'Troffsky's dinner."

Good Mrs Cornford, who had been a guardian angel to outcasts and pariahs all her life, and who painted as well as many a man with R. A. appended to his name, was certainly one of the women with whom Lord Byron would not have elected to dine. "Don't be dirty particular," was one of her favourite axioms in matters material as well as moral; and she saw no objection to the old-fashioned way of making fingers serve for forks and knives for spoons. She was, moreover, a *bon vivant* on a humble scale, and relished her food with the zest of health and gastronomic discrimination.

"If you've come for news, I've none to give you, so you needn't bother me with questions," she said, after a time. "Do you find the tripe good?"

"Indeed it is," Laura answered.

"Take some more, then. We won't leave any for manners. I'm mighty glad to see you, goosey. I've been as glum lately as a thief whose friends have been put in prison."

"Are you quite alone?" asked Laura.

"The chicks have had the measles, so I packed 'em off to Ramsgate, and Vittoria and Piggy have gone back to Paris."

"Monsieur Petroffsky is here?" Laura asked.

"For a very good reason, goosey; he is so paralysed that he can't run away. But he's very good company, though his mind is almost gone, bless him! and we sing duets together as merrily as two lame bluebottles caught in a spider's web. But you don't eat."

"I have really had enough, dear Mrs Cornford."

Thereupon Mrs Cornford put her fork in the choice morsel dainty Miss Silver had left on her plate, saying, naïvely—

"God thought of thrift before the devil invented company manners, so I save my tripe, my dear, and make no apology. It's uncommon good."

At this stage of affairs happened one of those rare and happy surprises that are interwoven like golden threads in the sober tissue of human life, and make it the welcome thing it is, with all its sadness.

"Mrs Cornford was about to raise her glass to her lips, having wished Laura "Long life, a pinch of good luck, and a handful of mother wit," when the cry so dear to London cats—"M—e—a—t!" was heard at the area-steps.

Now, it had been one of Perry's minor accomplishments to imitate street cries to such perfection that none but Polly Cornford ever knew when to distinguish the fictitious cat's-meat man, or lobster man, or water-cress vendor, or sweep, from the genuine one. But Polly Cornford's love for Perry had taken root in the days of his early

childhood, and was as nearly like a mother's instinct as could be. She recognised her prodigal's voice at once. Dropping her glass, shaking from head to foot, turning red and pale, she had just time to exclaim: "Perry, or Perry's ghost, as true as I'm a fool!" when the door opened, and Mr Perugino himself stood before the two ladies, looking by no means like a ghost, but extremely like himself, and no little pleased at the sensation he had evidently created.

"How d'ye do, Polly?" he said, embracing her with that good-natured condescension which over-indulged young men are apt to exercise towards their mothers, or any other good women whose love for them has never waxed cold. "How d'ye do, Polly? Better late than never, eh?"

Mrs Cornford's conduct was not precisely what might have been looked for under the circumstances. Had Perry come home sick, dejected, tatterdemalion, her tenderness would have equalled the tenderness of a mother nursing a suffering baby; but seeing him evidently in vigorous health and buoyant spirits, and, as far as appearances went, totally unmindful of the intense suffering he had caused her, the great love of the woman for once rose up in rebellion against her darling. She tried to put on a jaunty air, took her old place at the dinner-table, bade Perry sit down and eat, as she said, "not according to his deserts, but according to his welcome," and was about to help him, when

her fortitude broke down, and hiding her face in the corner of the table cloth, she cried like a child.

Perry, whose attention had been wholly absorbed by Laura during the last few minutes, and the bewitching effect of her violet velvet pelisse bordered with soft white fur, now turned to Mrs Cornford in dismay.

"Polly!" he cried, "what's the matter? Is that the way to welcome a fellow whose perils have beaten Sinbad's hollow? Thrice was I devoured of lions—nearly; thrice were my unburied bones bleached by the sun of the Sahara—at least, within an inch of it; I've been all but assassinated by wandering Bedouins, yet here I am safe and sound!"

Then he went up to his old friend, and drew away the table cloth from her face, and smiled down upon her, and kissed her as a son might have done, and said foolish little endearing things. And Polly Cornford forgot everything except her joy that this her prodigal "was dead, and was alive again, lost and was found."

After a little further talk, Perry sat down and devoured all they gave him, rushing up-stairs in the midst to shake old Petroffsky by the hand.

Mrs Cornford sent out Mary Hann for a bottle of sparkling Bordeaux; and Laura, who had risen to take leave once or twice, was compelled to stay and drink Perry's health. Whilst the young man

ate and drank, the two ladies sat watching him with large eyes of admiration and contentment. What a beautiful beard he had got! What a delightful look of health travel had given him! Surely his eyes were bluer and his smile more winning than the old! And his very speech had caught some delicious accent—Spanish or Arabic, they knew not what—which made it more attractive than ever!

Then Perry brought out of his travelling-bag some little trinkets of Moorish fabrication, and presented his adorers each with a bracelet of Arab coins and a lion's claw, set as a charm to keep off the Evil Eye; displaying other treasures with the superior air a school-boy puts on amongst his little sisters.

But at last Laura felt that she must go. Fairy-land could not last for ever. And very slowly she tied the strings of her little bonnet, and drew on her little fur-bordered gloves, Perry watching her all the while, his eyes saying welcome things. Then she shook hands with each, and walked home, with what sweet dreams and fancies floating in her mind there is no need to say!

CHAPTER LX.

TIDINGS OF KITTY.

WHEN Laura had gone, Perry and Mrs Cornford drew their chairs closer to the fire. Perry lighted a cigarette, Mrs Cornford busied herself in roasting chestnuts on the bars, and a long confidential talk was inevitable.

Perry's evanescent gaiety passed as soon as they found themselves alone. A change came over his face, making him look years older than he had done just before, and slightly sharpening the beautiful features which betrayed every mood and passion of his frank, boyish nature. He caught hold of Mrs Cornford's hand very eagerly, and said, under his breath—

"Have you heard of her?"

"Of Kitty? Nothing good, you may be sure," Polly retorted. "Expect a hull that has been stranded for twenty years to bear oak-apples, before you look for gratitude from the worldly wise."

Perry smoked away in a sober, dreary, practical mood. Formerly he would have resented so severe a stricture on Kitty; but his eyes had been opened of late. There was no denying the fact that Kitty had approved herself worldly wise.

"What have you heard?" he asked.

"Oh! the old story," Mrs Cornford said, impatiently. "An eagle doesn't forsake the carcass to

chirp in the thicket with hedge-sparrows, and no more will Kitty change her nature to please you or me."

Perry grew gloomier than ever.

"Many a time have I wished myself dead on that woman's account," he said.

"The Almighty doesn't put fools out of harm's way just to oblige 'em, or where would be the examples for the wise?"

"And I grew wiser when the fever brought me so low that I verily thought my hour was come," Perry answered, smiling a little grimly. "I made a vow then, that if ever Richard was himself again, Kitty and care might go to the devil, and I would be from thenceforth a wise man."

"Keep the last part of that vow by all means," Polly said, making a somewhat satirical grimace.

"I knew well enough what you would say," Perry said, severely; "but wait and see. The first step I take towards a reformed life is to marry sweet Laura Norman."

Mrs Cornford would have interrupted him, but he waved his hand with a lofty air of command, and continued—

"The next step I take is to paint a grand Biblical picture—called the Queen of Sheba's Halt in the Desert—and sell it for five hundred guineas."

"Say two thousand at once," Mrs Cornford put in wickedly.

"The third step I take is to get elected R. A.;

and the fourth, to hire a nice house in Kensington, and live in ease and plenty all the rest of my days."

"How jolly!" cried Mrs Cornford.

"You know you don't believe in me the least bit," Perry said. "You are like Kitty: you think me the most visionary creature in the world. Now, Laura Norman"—

—"Oh! the vanity of men!—who shall compass it?" said Mrs Cornford—"who shall mortify it? But come, my good Perry, tell me where you fell ill, and how it came about that I was so many months without hearing of you. You can make up your mind whether you will marry Laura Norman or the Queen of the Sandwich Islands to-morrow."

And she carried Perry up-stairs to Petroffsky's room, that the lonely old man might be amused by his story, which lasted till the evening came on. Then Perry went out to see one or two of his friends, who kept him till past midnight, Mrs Cornford waiting supper for him meanwhile.

After a few days he fell into his old habits—painting when the humour seized him; playing on his piano for hours at a time; doing the things he liked to do, and avoiding those he found irksome. He seldom mentioned Kitty's name, and always with the utmost bitterness. Mrs Cornford accepted it as a healthy sign that at last he acknowledged she did not care for him.

"She will marry that mean little beggar, Sir

George Bartelotte," he had said once or twice, telling Mrs Cornford at the same time all sorts of stories he had picked up somehow about Sir George's odd ways. And, true enough, before Perry had been home a week, came the following confirmation of his fears in the *Court Journal*—the paragraph having been sent Mrs Cornford by a friend who was a dressmaker in the West End—"A marriage is about to take place between Sir George Bartelotte, Bart., of Akenholme Park, Berks, and Miss Katharine Silver, daughter of the late Reverend Nehemiah Silver, of London."

"Well done, thou daughter of Mammon!" cried Mrs Cornford, after reading the extract to Perry over their dinner-table. "May we all serve our gods as faithfully as thou hast done, and get as well rewarded! Health and long life to my Lady Bartelotte, and a good appetite to her for the flesh-pots of Egypt."

Perry's eyes were devouring the paragraph, and he did not heed Mrs Cornford's speech.

"Come Perugino," she said, with a little forced gaiety, "toast our old comrade. Let bygones be bygones, and wish Kitty good luck."

"I can't be a hypocrite," said poor Perry, looking utterly miserable. "She has been my perdition. Why should I wish her good luck? I hope she will be a little unhappy sometimes."

"Stuff and nonsense!" interrupted Polly. "Have you no religion in you? Do you take Kitty to be

like the brute beasts, born without a soul? Do you suppose the gilt on her gingerbread is an inch thick? I've other notions, and I wish the poor thing good luck."

"You are the most extraordinarily inconsistent person in the world," Perry answered, savagely. "Had Kitty done the right thing, and married me, I suppose you would have blamed her conduct as much as you seem to approve of it now."

"Who says I approve, O paragon of donkeys?" said Mrs Cornford. "It isn't for us poor fools to judge each other, or to dole out the kicks and halfpence of this world either. If Kitty gets halfpence to day, I'm glad; and if kicks to-morrow, which there's little doubt of, I'll put salve on the bruises, and make no remarks."

"You think she will be unhappy?" asked Perry, with a touch of self-reproach. "O Kitty, Kitty!"

And saying this he rushed up-stairs to his studio, and locked himself in for the rest of the day.

The news of Kitty's approaching marriage reached Dr Norman's quiet household at the same time. Laura cut out the paragraph and sent it to Regy, who professed himself to be Kitty's devoted admirer still, and Prissy deluged her elder sister with questions about Kitty's future rank and position in the world. Dr Norman made no comment, determined to let matters take their course; but when day succeeded day, and Kitty's marriage was still

the theme at meal-times, he said one morning, in a very decided tone of voice—

“Children, let this be the last talk about Miss Silver. It is right that we forgive her for the wrong she has done us; but we can never have part or lot with her any more, and the sooner her very name is forgotten the better.”

“May Laura and I talk about her when we are by ourselves?” Prissy asked.

“I think you might easily find a more pleasant subject,” Dr Norman said, bitterly.

“Laura doesn’t care for my subject, papa, and likes to walk for miles without speaking,” Prissy said.

Laura blushed deeply.

“Settle your subject when out walking as you like,” Dr Norman answered; “but, for Heaven’s sake, let us have our meals in future without all this talking about Kitty.”

“O papa, dear, how cross we are to-day!” cried pert Miss Prissy, patting his hand reprovingly.

“We have enough to make us cross, I think,” Dr Norman said, not heeding his little girl’s caress.

“Have we? but Dr Watts says that ‘we should not let our angry passions rise,’ papa.”

“Dr Watts was a fool,” Dr Norman answered.

“Then I won’t learn any more of his hymns,” Miss Prissy rejoined.

Dr Norman felt hereupon bound to give his little daughter an explanation.

"Pray understand me, Prissy," he went on. "If Dr Watts had said we should not let our angry passions rise for nothing, he would have been right. But there are occasions when it is one's duty to be angry. For instance, Martin Luther was right to let his angry passion rise against the Pope."

"And Kitty is your pope, isn't she, papa? Naughty Pope! Poor Martin Luther!"

Then the patting and caressing began again, and Dr Norman, seeing no way to enlighten Prissy's moral notions further, took refuge in his library. His experiments and lucubrations did not go on well for the next few days. The former seemed unsatisfactory, the latter uninteresting. He invited a friend or two to dinner; but the conversation lagged, to his thinking, and the dishes were ill-cooked. He accompanied Laura to a small evening party, and found the women very dull or very frivolous. He received a flattering invitation from a learned society at Halle to read a paper there before their next assembly, coupled with a report of his speculations, and he thought what learned lumber German writing was, and what a long journey this vexatious amiability compelled him to make!

In plain English, the tidings of Kitty's approaching marriage put Dr Norman into a state of irritation which lasted for several days, and might have lasted much longer, but for a severe cold, which he caught whilst moodily studying the

binary stars from the house-top one damp autumnal night.

The cold, with its attendant discomforts, kept him to his bed for a week, and effectually cured his ill-temper.

Meantime, when the first flush of her great joy had passed away, Laura's heart was full of wonder and uneasiness. Should she encounter Perry again? Did he care for her still? Would he devise some way of seeing her and speaking to her sometimes? She remembered that she was no longer a child, and that Perry's friendship for her must henceforth mean more than it had done a year ago. And in those sweet days of comradeship it had not been all over with Perry and Kitty; but Kitty was lost to Perry now, and Laura read in his bright looks and buoyant manner happy auguries for herself.

She did not grudge Kitty the early, faithful passion of that dear heart—for Kitty had been a goddess to Laura also—but she longed to recompense him for past sufferings by loving him and clinging to him till life should end.

This was sweet Laura's ambition.

CHAPTER LXI.

"FROGGY WOULD A-WOOING GO."

PERRY shut himself up in his studio for several days, and refused alike counsel and comfort from everybody. When night came on, he would wrap himself up in his Spanish cloak, and stalk up and down the lonely Brompton lanes, to the infinite terror of any benighted little milliner's apprentice, or timid elderly gentleman he might encounter. Solitude, he said, was what he wanted, and he could never get half enough of it. Those who loved him now could best show it by betaking themselves out of his sight. "After Kitty's marriage, the deluge," he reiterated to Polly Cornford. "The world for me is virtually at an end. I am a ghost, I consort only with dire shapes and spirits. My nightly visions would terrify you so that your hair stood on end."

"Not they," good Polly would answer, cheerfully. "I have never been frightened in my life but once, and that was when I slipped down on the rocks at Ramsgate, and there stuck like a jelly-fish."

Perry gave vent to his feelings in painting a picture on an enormous canvas, which he said was to be his bridal gift to Kitty.

The composition was in the worst manner of Gustave Doré, and the execution perfect as scene-

painting. Two Titanic figures stalked across a weird plain, bordered with apocryphal ravines, and mountains belching fire; the heavens were black, save where a ghastly moon broke forth above the two wanderers, one of whom was fleeing from the pursuit of the other.

The pursued, it is hardly necessary to say, was Kitty—Kitty young, Kitty beautiful, but Kitty haunted and aghast with fear; the other, who followed as her shadow, was Perry's ghost, with just as much likeness put into the face as a skeleton admitted of.

Perry exulted over this conception far more than he had ever exulted over any work before.

"Is it not a masterpiece?" he would ask of Polly again and again; and Polly, to humour his frantic fancy, would say Yes, and stare at it and declare that it made her flesh creep.

When the picture was done Perry felt better. His frenzy passed as an ague-fit. He was again, as Polly said, "clothed, and in his right mind."

Then his thoughts reverted to Laura.

"I have sown my wild oats, Polly," he said, seriously. "Like the man who listened to the Ancient Mariner, I have become a sadder and a wiser man. Why should I not cast anchor for once and for all by marrying that sweet girl?"

"Why should you not, indeed," cried Polly, "if she would have you, and if Dr Norman approved of a scapegrace for a son-in-law?"

"An artist," said Perry, waving his hand, "is always a gentleman, and my prospects could not be better."

"Your clothes might be a trifle better," Polly said, quizzically. "At any rate, don't go a courting till you've got a new coat."

"I will order a velvet one to-morrow, and as soon as it comes home—well, we shall see what I do then."

"Froggy would a-wooing go,
Whether his mother would let him or no,"

began Polly; and for several days, whenever Perry broached the subject of his attachment to Laura, she repeated the strain. That Perry seriously entertained the idea of proposing to Laura, she never for a moment suspected. The idea was too preposterous.

But Perry had never been more in earnest during the term of his existence. He yearned for sympathy, and had not Laura given him sympathy of the sweetest kind? He yearned for some woman's love, and was he not as sure of Laura's love, as of Kitty's indifference? In fine, he yearned to turn over a fresh page of life; and this one promised to be very fair.

Perry's genius was not baffled by such considerations as difference of social position and want of

money. He consulted one of his friends, Crosbie Carrington, who promised to help him.

"I know some people who meet Dr Norman and his pretty daughter at a house in Bayswater. I'll ask them to take you, or get you invited—being a distinguished artist—and, once there, any one will introduce you to the old buffer—I mean the doctor."

Crosbie Carrington was as good as his word, and soon there came a formal invitation from the family at Bayswater to an *At Home*. Perry got himself up magnificently, thanks to a dress suit borrowed of Crosbie, and a new pair of shiny boots, and a dress shirt on which he laid out his last guinea. Moreover he had his hair cut and his beard dressed by a barber, and got some one to lend him a limp opera hat to carry in his hand, as the fashion of the day requires.

Perry felt considerable elation as he alighted from his Hansom cab about eleven o'clock at a well-appointed, spacious house in Porchester Terrace, and heard the big footman at the bottom of the staircase call out stentoriously, "Mr Perugino Neeve!" and then the big footman at the top, as Perry afterwards jocosely related, "took 'up the wondrous tale;" and the mistress of the house came forward, and the master of the house came forward, and he was made much of, as, being a genius, it behoved him to be.

It was not a crowded party, and the first per-

sons on whom Perry's eye lighted were Laura Norman and her father. Dr Norman, recognising Mrs Cornford's friend, at once held out his hand; Laura felt that she might do the same, and the three talked like old acquaintances.

"Your friends and the public have had great cause for uneasiness on your behalf," Dr Norman began; and feeling a friendliness for the frank, handsome, gifted young fellow, whom he imagined to be struggling with want and obscurity, he added one or two gracious little speeches about his last picture in the Academy.

By and by, Perry's hostess came up, wanting to introduce him to So-and-So and So-and-So; and Laura's heart bounded at the homage her hero was receiving. The mistress of the house was, in truth, a most amiable and liberal-minded lion-hunter, who did infinite service to society in general by collecting in her drawing-room not only the big lions who can roar, and show their teeth, and lash their tails, but the timid lions and the toothless lions, and the little lions who have very small tails, and don't know in the least how to lash them.

Perry, coming under the last category, was trained accordingly. His hostess had heard of Mr Neeve's great musical attainments. Would Mr Neeve play some little bagatelle or other? And, of course, Perry sat down and played one or two of Schumann's compositions, in his best, most fantastic manner, and then a delicious French melody,

light and airy as a play of fountains, and his audience listened with delight.

But the young lion was to lash his tail with still greater effect. Mrs——, the hostess, was honoured by the presence of a Persian gentleman, an attaché of some great Mogul or other then on a mission to England, and there was no one but his interpreter to talk to him. Could Mr Neeve remember a word or two of Arabic? Perry could remember a word or two, he said; and lo! there was the painter of "The Cedar Forest," and the accomplished musician, talking the language of Mahomet and the patriarchs trippingly on the tongue—gutturals, sibilations, astounding aspirated vowels, and all! Whether Perry's Arabic would have borne more critical investigation is another matter, but he began by quoting the opening verses of the Koran, to show his proficiency to his interlocutor, and necessarily did not feel called upon to make long speeches after such a beginning.

The Persian talked. Perry asked if he were hungry? whence he had come? whither he was going? if his grandmother were well?—a punctilio of Eastern ceremonial—half a dozen other questions, and then they blessed each other in the name of the Prophet. Perry was next deputed to take a lady down to the refreshment-room, where he made an excellent little supper, and he made a second little supper on his own account, and went away intoxicated with the evening's pleasure.

True, he had only talked to Laura for five minutes, but what an auspicious introduction to good society!

"I wish you had been there, Polly," he said to poor, patient Mrs Cornford, who was sitting up to let him in and hear his report. "It was such a jolly party, and I cut as good a figure as any of my betters, I assure you."

Then he told her the whole story from beginning to end; and Polly went to bed, feeling that if one thing in the world would recompense her for the kicks and cuffs of fortune, it was her boy's success in life. Why should not Perry marry Laura Norman? Why should not Perry make himself a reputation in the world? After all, Kitty's evil behaviour might prove his salvation instead of his undoing. Who should say?

Perry rose next day, determined to strike while the iron was hot, and declare his intentions to Dr Norman whilst Dr Norman's favourable impression of him should be green.

Mrs Cornford sent proverbs and wise saws at his head, as thick and hardhitting as hailstones, in dissuasion of such a proceeding, but Perry shook them off.

"Now or never is the time for me to marry and make a man of myself," he said; "if I once begin shilly-shallying, the end will be that I shall take to thinking about Kitty again and have no courage for anything."

“Well, wait a week.”

• “Not a day, not an hour,” Perry said, authoritatively, and ringing the bell, cried out to Mary Hann: “Mary Hann, black my boots to the best of your juvenile ability, and then bring ’em to me to finish off.”

As soon as he had finished his breakfast, Mr Perugino took off his coat, and worked away zealously at his boots till the desirable polish was attained. Then he dived into the little scullery, and filling the largest bucket that could be found with warm water, went up-stairs to perform his toilette.

The toilette occupied upwards of an hour, at the end of which time Mr Perugino emerged like one of the Trojan heroes whom the wand of Pallas Athene has washed, curled, perfumed, and arrayed by magic.

“My stars!” cried Polly, “I’m sure the world must be coming to an end”.

“I’m sorry to say my cravats are,” Perry said, dolefully. “And a dark-blue necktie would be just a point of colour in the picture!”

“I’ll run to the bottom of the street and buy you one,” Polly said, good-naturedly; and, quick as lightning, she put on her bonnet and performed the errand.

When, as Perry complacently observed, the last touch had been put in, he sallied forth, Mrs Cornford singing after him—

"Froggy would a-wooing go,
Whether his mother would let him or no;
Roly-poly gammon and spinach,
Heigho! says Roly."

CHAPTER LXII.

LAURA'S SATURDAYS.

PERRY felt as brave as a lion till he found himself in Dr Norman's library, awaiting Dr Norman. Then the sort of disagreeable suspense with which we await the dentist who is to draw out a tooth took possession of him; and, as he described to Mrs Cornford, not a nerve in his body but turned traitor to him in his hour of need; and he thought nobody had ever quaked so thoroughly—except the devil when St Dunstan held him by the nose!

Dr Norman greeted his visitor with the utmost blandness, adding—"You would not have been admitted, except that it is just lunch-time, as I am always busy till half-past one o'clock. Will you take a tête-à-tête lunch with me? My little girls are spending the day at Hampstead."

"Thank you—I am unable to stay to-day," poor Perry stammered forth; "I have an engagement."

"I suppose, like all artists, you are glad to utilise what little daylight we get at this season?" Dr Norman said, for he noticed the young man's embarrassment, and wanted to set him at ease.

"Yes," Perry answered, gathering courage; "my last picture being well thought of, I want to make hay while the sun shines, as the saying goes. I trust you have no prejudice against men of my craft, sir?"

"On the contrary," Dr Norman said, "I am proud to number artists among my acquaintances—the rising men as well as the veterans."

Perry grew bolder and bolder.

"I am delighted to hear you say so, especially as I have come to ask a great favour of you," he said, twirling his hat in his fingers—it was borrowed for the occasion—rather nervously. "I dare say you will be surprised to hear that I have conceived a sincere attachment for your daughter, Miss Laura." (If that is not a proper and polite way of putting it, thought Perry, nothing is!)

Dr Norman did not look, as young novelists say, as if a thunderbolt had dropped at his feet; but he certainly looked amused and amazed—amused at the idea of his little Laura having a lover, and amazed at Mr Perugino, of unwashed memory, being that lover. Smiling, not unkindly, but with an underlying current of mixed humour and vexation, he said—

"My dear sir, Laura is a child."

"She is nineteen, sir," Perry said, with great gravity; "and I am twenty-five. One can hardly begin a happy life too early."

"True, true," Dr Norman answered; "but what

do you two know of each other? It seems to me that the question is mooted somewhat prematurely."

"I had the happiness of seeing a good deal of Miss Laura in Paris," Perry answered, still on his best behaviour; "and I think we understand each other pretty well. But of course I could not speak of my wishes to her till I had heard how favourably you might be disposed towards me."

"You have acted like a man of honour," Dr Norman said, shaking the young man by the hand. "My poor little girl is motherless, and has no advisers but myself—more's the pity."

Then the tears filled Dr Norman's eyes, and he walked up and down the room in great perplexity.

He did not know in the least what to say to this new friend of Laura's, this ardent young wooer, this promising aspirant in the field of art. Certainly, he should not have chosen a poor young artist as the husband of his child; but in matters of love and marriage, who can choose for another? Dr Norman had never entertained the thought of his little girls making, to use a common phrase, "a good match;" neither had he any such ambition for his boys. What he prized in women was grace, sweetness, beauty, wisdom. What he prized in men was high purpose, integrity, eloquence, manliness. Gifts and graces were the criteria by which he appraised his fellows; wanting these, and possessing abundance of other things, they were poor in his eyes.

He knew little enough of Perry, except that he was a genius; that he possessed a sweet, affectionate, winning nature, one could read at first sight; but even coupled with genius, was this enough? Had Perry the stuff in him to get free from his early connections, to embrace a hard-working and domestic life, to avoid the moral shoals and quicksands to which a young man of genius is exposed; to be such a friend, lover, and protector as Laura needed?

On the other hand, if he and Laura loved each other truly, had he the right to forbid their intercourse? Was not Perry fairly entitled to a fair trial at his hands? Many a less worthy man than he had been shipwrecked in early life by the want of a little timely trust and kindness. Many a less promising youth had been nipped in the bud by the contempt of those whose favour was a sunshine. All these considerations passed through Dr Norman's mind in the space of a minute or two; Perry sitting by, fidgeting, changing colour, suffering from a suspense that was half real, half serio-comic.

"Could I only have bolted then," he told Polly, "never again would froggy have gone a-wooing in the space of his mortal career."

Dr Norman sat down.

"I really don't know what to say to your proposition, so greatly has it taken me by surprise," he said. "I have no right that I know of to give

you a point-blank refusal; at the same time, I feel hardly justified in giving my immediate consent. May I ask a question which, under the circumstances, is hardly indelicate?"

"Certainly," poor Perry said, colouring to the brow. He expected some allusion to Kitty.

"Have you sufficient means to support a wife—whose sole portion would be a modest allowance out of my own income?"

"I have only what I earn, sir," answered Perry, with great dignity.

"I should be sorry to see my child married to a man who despised work or workers," Dr Norman said, "but do you earn enough and to spare for your own wants? A man who marries a comparatively portionless girl should first ask himself that question."

"I have no doubt that I could do so—had I any sufficient motive," Perry said. "A fellow loses courage when it concerns nobody else whether he works well or ill."

"True," Dr Norman said, very seriously; and for some minutes he was again silent. Then he hesitatingly asked Perry another question. "Could you withdraw yourself from the companions and associations among which Laura found herself in Paris when under Mrs Cornford's roof? I have nothing whatever to say against them or Mrs Cornford, whom I esteem from the bottom of my heart—

except that it is not the kind of society I should select for my child."

"I would do anything in the world you like," poor Perry said, dying to end the interview.

"Well," Dr Norman answered, in a more cheerful tone, "you shall be at liberty to come to my house, and renew your acquaintance with Laura. Can I say more than this?"

"Oh, no," Perry said. "Indeed you couldn't possibly say more, and you're a——he was going to say—a brick—but checked himself in time, and added—"and you're a kind friend to me, sir, indeed!"

Dr Norman rose and gave Perry his hand. Perry started up like one electrified, so pleased was he at the prospect of a dismissal, and the two shook hands cordially.

"Laura and I receive our friends on Saturday evenings, from eight o'clock till eleven," Dr Norman said. "On these occasions you will always be welcome. I need hardly ask of you a complete reticence on the subject of your wishes for the present."

"I will be as circumspect as possible," Perry said; and after a word or two more, he contrived to get away.

"I hope I have not been rash," was Dr Norman's soliloquy, as soon as he found himself alone. "The young man seems modest and sincere, and is undoubtedly gifted in a surpassing degree. Why

should he not do well? And I could hardly forbid him my house, when he is made welcome at the houses of my intimate friends."

"I'm in for it," Perry cried, throwing himself at full length on Mrs Cornford's little sofa. "I'm in for being respectable all the rest of my life! Laura is an angel, and I look upon myself as the happiest fellow under the sun; but O Polly, my good soul, give me a drink of water, for the African fever was not half so bad to encounter as Dr Norman!"

But Perry determined to persevere. Every Saturday, after an hour's toilette, he emerged, curled, perfumed, and trim as Odysseus from the transforming wand of Athene. At a quarter past eight precisely he entered Laura's little drawing-room, hat in hand, gloved, and looking as much as possible like a Parisian dandy in a drawing-room comedy at the Variétés. Dr Norman had simply said to Laura, on the first Saturday after Perry's interview with him—

"Laura, perhaps Mr Perugino Neeve may call this evening. If so, let us have a little music."

And Laura had coloured to the brow, and her sweet, shy eyes had looked so exultant at the news, that Dr Norman saw at a glance how matters stood with his little girl's heart.

That first evening, Laura put on a blue dress, bright as a bit of April sky, and bound her fair hair with a little gold fillet; and what with this enchanting dress, and the pea-blossom hue of her

cheeks, and the grateful look of happiness filling her sweet eyes, she looked as dainty a little damsel as ever delighted a lover's sight.

Hitherto, these Saturdays had been somewhat a heavy undertaking to the poor child, who was at present only beginning to know her father's guests. But Perry's appearance altered the entire aspect of things. The weeks were all golden now, because each contained a Saturday, and Saturday was happiness. Perry behaved in a manner wholly irreproachable, and he confessed to Polly Cornford that he marvelled at himself. He behaved to Laura so circumspectly as to inspire Dr Norman with confidence. He uttered no inadmissible slang. His appearance was irreproachable. He played superbly to amuse the company, and his hands had evidently been washed within recent memory.

It must be confessed that, up to this period, Perry's conversion was wholly that of the inner man. At home, he worked as fitfully, and smoked as persistently as ever; sat up till past midnight playing dominoes and drinking beer with Crosbie Carrington and other friends, or playing billiards at the "Fulham Arms;" descended to his studio at mid-day, unwashed, unkempt, and in his shirt-sleeves, to paint for an hour or two, or perhaps to compose a waltz for Laura's next reception, or very often to read a greasy novel of Dickens or Paul de Kock, hired from the library at a penny a volume per diem.

Mrs Cornford might coax or entreat, or declare that she would go and tell Dr Norman what sort of son-in-law he was going to have—Perry only laughed or chided in his patronising spoiled-child way, and made answer—

“All in good time, Polly. As soon as I am married, no fabricator of pictures for the London market shall work harder than I.”

“When the sky falls we shall catch larks,” Mrs Cornford would retort; “and when parrots leave off prating they’ll catch mice like owls. Oh! I know you.”

“I am such a poor creature, just because of your unbelief,” Perry said. “When I have got a trusting little wife by my side, I shall become a second Turner.”

“You are clever enough to become anything you choose. But what have you done since coming back, pray, Mr Harum-scarum?”

“I have been too brimful of impressions,” Perry said, grandly. “The flash of inspiration, like molten gold, must cool ere it takes the form of sovereigns.”

And Dr Norman would sometimes say—“And your pictures, Mr Perugino?” The doctor preferred his young friend’s Christian name, tickled by the artistic and sonorous sound of it.

“Oh! I work like a slave,” Perry would reply; “but the daylight is so short, that by the end of a week I have done nothing.”

He generally carried a sketch-book or portfolio with him to the Addison Road, and delighted Prissy beyond measure by illustrating a chapter of Robinson Crusoe for her especial benefit. But anything like a finished work never appeared.

Dr Norman's friends were sufficiently versed in art to distinguish genius from mechanism, and declared Perry to be a genius of the first water. Moreover, the young man's simple, happy, impulsive way of doing things, and almost childish enjoyment of unexpected trifles, and his anxiety to please others, won every heart. Circumstances, therefore, favoured Perry's suit; and one day Dr Norman called Laura to him, and said very kindly—a mother could hardly have been more kind—

“I think, Laura, we all know why Mr Perugino is so fond of coming here by this time. Shall I say that my little Laura likes to have him for her friend?—or send him away?”

And Laura, whose conscience smote her for having given her best friendship to Perry long ago, and for having tried to understand her father less than a daughter should, took his hand to her lips and shed tears over it, crying—

“O papa! I have not been good to you, and you—you are an angel to me!”

CHAPTER LXIII.

"A DREADFUL DOOR IN HER SOUL STOOD WIDE."

KITTY and Sir George remained masters of the field. The marriage was accepted past question. The wedding preparations had been put in hand. In a fortnight's time Kitty would become Lady Bartelotte.

Ella was not the person to make any sort of sacrifice with a bad grace, and she did her best, by every possible act of consideration and generosity, to atone for her past opposition. She lectured Sir George severely on one or two shabby little proposals that he happened to make in her hearing; and to her intervention poor Kitty owed a far more liberal trousseau than in her most ambitious moments she had ever dreamed of. Then Ella talked to Kitty as any practical person double Kitty's age might have done, on the necessity of holding her own, and keeping her husband in his proper place, not by covert blandishments, but by rational candour.

"Dear papa and I would have been wretched if we had made a compact never to contradict each other," she said; "and I am quite sure, Kitty, that you will be ten times happier if you begin by treating papa quite frankly, and saying what you like or dislike."

"You forget," Kitty said, very humbly, "that I

am not Sir George's daughter, but a penniless—in some senses—a friendless girl, whom he condescends to marry.”

“Nonsense! When a man marries a woman, he makes her his equal; though,” Ella added, with a touch of humour, “I think in this case, dear Kitty, that the condescension is wholly on your side.”

And much more Ella said to the same purpose; and Kitty listened, promising this, assenting to that, ready to do anything and everything, out of the fulness of her gratitude.

She was enjoying a little interval of repose that was inexpressibly welcome and dear. Behind lay the past—the past of unrest, and struggle, and ambition; before lay the future, for which she had toiled and span, and she trusted it, and went on her way rejoicing.

There were trifles that made her cheeks glow with pleasure, such as wedding gifts, little notes of friendly recognition from Ella's cousins, invitations from some of Sir George's friends in England; one—O happiness!—signed by an earl's daughter—and other things of the kind recurring daily. These small triumphs astounded and dazzled poor Kitty beyond measure. What had she done to deserve such signal good fortune?

One evening she sat in her room, lost in the contemplation of her treasures, moral and material, and enjoying a rare feast of solitude. Sir George had become a much more exacting lover of late,

reasoning thus—"If my chivalry leads me so far as to marry this girl, surely she has a right to reward me accordingly?" Kitty must always be walking with him, reading to him, writing for him, and flattering him, or he grew irritable and jealous. A little solitude was therefore a rare feast, and on this particular occasion Kitty felt disposed to enjoy it like an epicure. She walked to the wardrobe, and opening the door, contemplated her new dresses one by one. There was a velvet dress, a satin dress, and a lace dress, all new treasures, and a white dress for her wedding, and other delightful things, owed to Ella's generosity. Then she opened her drawers, and handled delicate laces and cashmere morning-gowns, and embroidered pocket-handkerchiefs—all Ella's gifts. Lastly, she took up her jewel-case, and putting it on her lap, smiled the smile of a joyful child.

Kitty's belongings were certainly nothing extraordinary, and by no means exceeded those of any gentlewoman of ordinary means. But then she had been a draggle-tailed Cinderella, a beggar's daughter only two or three years ago, and she felt herself by comparison transformed into a fairy princess, a King Cophetua's bride! She turned over her trinkets one by one. There were Myra's gifts—the trinkets she had worn in Paradise Place had been discarded long ago—the gold brooch of Trichinopoly work, which had marked the beginning of their friendship, the bracelets, the rings,

and other gifts. How rich she had once felt herself in the possession of these! And what were they in comparison to later acquisitions? There was the pearl necklace, Ella's gift, and the opal and diamond ring, Sir George's pledge of betrothal, and an old-fashioned but handsome diamond agrafe, the wedding gift of Sir George's sister; and last of all, her crowning pride and delight, a case of jewels which had belonged to Sir George's mother, and which Ella declared to be Kitty's beyond all question now.

Kitty sat amid her wealth, a bewitched and bewildered thing. Was life in truth a reality or a dream, and should she wake up one morning to find her treasure spent, lost, visionary as fairy-gold? She felt so rich that she could hardly help doubting in her riches now and then.

As she was thinking these thoughts, Francine tapped lightly, and entered with letters. Letters were pleasant things to Kitty now, since they generally contained congratulations, or gracious little nothings from some of Ella's kin, and she took them eagerly. The first was a somewhat pompous but kindly-meant note from one of these future relatives of Kitty, which she read with a smile of contentment. The other was from Polly Cornford, and brimful, as Polly Cornford's letters were sure to be, of slang, good-natured scoldings, wise saws and comments. Polly wrote to congratulate her runaway upon her approaching marriage; and Kitty

read on, thinking what a kind and forbearing letter it was, and how unselfish a slangy, slatternly, outspoken creature like Polly could be.

Polly, in truth, spite of her radical discontent with Kitty's conduct, could not help feeling and expressing a certain amount of pleasure at her good fortune. Polly loved Perry with all her heart, but she saw exactly how much his inconsequent behaviour was to be charged to Kitty's so-called treachery; and when the vials of her wrath were once spent upon the traitor, a little worldly-wise congratulation was evidently lurking behind. Polly Cornford was far from being a proper-minded person, giving just an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. From her the devil always got his due, and a little more. But the gist of her letter lay in a postscript. And this is how the postscript ran:—

"P.S.—You'll be glad to hear that Perry is not the fool he was. The Lord be praised for it! He is engaged to marry Laura Norman, with her daddy's consent, and will beat his betters yet. My blessing on you both; and to you, my lady, gilt gingerbread without end, and an appetite accordingly."

Kitty started from her seat, and held Polly's letter to the lamp with trembling hands and dilated eyes. Yes, the words were as plainly written as it was possible to be. *He is engaged to marry Laura Norman!*

She dashed the letter aside, took it up and tore it asunder, then matched the fragments, and read for a third, a fourth, nay, a fifth time—*He is engaged to marry Laura Norman!*

She crushed the letter in her hands with fresh passion, and kneeling before the fire, thrust it between the bars. When it had burned away she unlocked a drawer, and took out a little silk bundle. It will be remembered that during the first weeks of Kitty's stay at Shelley House, Perry had gone down to see her. Terribly frightened lest his ragamuffinly appearance should scandalise so proper a young lady as herself, she brushed his coat, and taking up a pair of scissors, clipped an inch or two of that long curly hair that Perry never willingly trimmed. It will be remembered that the operation was hardly over when Regy entered, and, quick as lightning, locks and scissors were thrust in Miss Kitty's apron pocket.

Kitty had often laughed at herself and chided herself for keeping such a souvenir of her old lover; but whenever her trunks were turned out, on arrival or departure, the little silk bundle had hitherto found a corner. She used to think that some day or other the bright curls of hair should be put in a locket and occasionally worn. And if the temptation had come to destroy them, they always looked so soft and bright, and reminded her so forcibly of Perry, that she hesitated. But now, why should she keep Perry's locks any longer?

He no longer claimed pity or tenderness at her hands. He had engaged himself to Laura Norman. As much jealousy, madness, hatred, call it what you will, as a woman feels whose lover forsakes her, Kitty felt now, because her forsaken lover had found consolation.

She opened the little silk bundle with quick, angry fingers, and turned the mass of gold-brown locks into her lap. Then, gathering up her apron, she would have emptied its contents into the fire, but something seemed to hold her back. She sat down, glanced round at her velvets and silks, at the treasures of her jewel-case displayed on the table, at the betrothal ring on her finger, and sighed, and was fain to weep, if tears would only come! Perry, then, cared for her no longer! Was there indeed no such thing as truth in the world? Was Sir George's affection the most worth having? If so, she had chosen the right casket after all. But a voice spoke from her heart on Perry's behalf. How had she requited his devotion? What had she done to make him happy? Was he not justly rewarded by Laura's love? Was she not justly punished by his indifference? She took up the soft, bright locks, kissed them, pressed them to her heart, rocking herself to and fro, in a passion of grief, anger, desolation. At last she said, half aloud, as if Perry's spirit were near, and she were praying to it, "O Perry, I do love you!—I do!—I do!"

The sound of her own voice, so pitiful, so solitary, so penitent as it was, brought tears; and on her knees—she knew not to whom she was praying, if indeed the act could be called a prayer at all—she cried abundantly, and called on Perry's name, and begged for forgiveness. In that brief conflict, half-retrospection and half-prophecy, "a dreadful door in her soul stood wide," as William Allingham's poem runs.

She saw wherein she differed from those whose goodness she now envied for the first time. She knew that she should rise up on the morrow and live and move and act as the Kitty of old, and enjoy the life she had chosen, in spite of such retributive thoughts as would come now and then.

But to-day Perry's image took complete possession of her. For his sake she would fain have had many acts of the past revocable. So strongly was she suffering with him, and by reason of him now, that had a straight short path led to his abiding-place, she would perhaps have taken it, and fled from her triumphs!

"Poor Perry!" she said to herself again and again, recalling his looks and words with fresh bursts of tears, as one recalls looks and words of the dead. How fond he had once been of her! Did he really love Laura Norman, or was his engagement the mere consequence of his desponding and loneliness? She knew not what she thought, or what she wished to think; and when at last she

went to bed, it was to dream of the old life and the old love, before she had tasted ambition and Perry had battled with despair.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE BELGRAVIAN WEDDING.

SIR GEORGE was determined to do everything on as economical a scale as circumstances admitted; and so absorbed did he seem in this matter, that one would have thought the saving of a few shillings of infinitely more importance to him than the securing a young bride. The marriage was to take place, with the utmost privacy, at the Consulate. Poor Kitty must forego the train of bridesmaids, the bridal banquet, and other ceremonials that fashion has ordained; and so strictly practical was her last and most favoured lover, that he even forbade himself the cost of a new coat in honour of the occasion. Custom has always prescribed a honeymoon, but a honeymoon may be long or short, simple or costly, according to circumstances and inclination. Sir George ordained that their honeymoon should be very simple indeed.

"We have outlived our juvenile follies, have we not?" he would say to Kitty; as if the fact of their engagement equalised them in age as well as other things; and poor Kitty confessed to have

outlived her juvenile follies. So they were to go to Gibraltar for a month, and take up their abode in a house lent them by a friend of Sir George's. "If not too expensive, we will visit Cadiz and Ronda," Sir George had said; and Kitty sincerely hoped that it might not be too expensive, thinking how dull they should find a month to themselves at Gibraltar. Ella was to remain, meantime, at Malaga with the Gardiners; and when the spring should have fairly set in, the little party intended to return homeward. Nothing, therefore, could have been more prosaic than Kitty's wedding. It was not a gloomy wedding, thanks to Ella's intervention. There was a pretty little breakfast, adorned with costly flowers. The Gardiners came, and Mr Tyrrell, acting the part of Sir George's groomsman, and another friend; all of whom brought flowers and gifts for the bride, which they presented with pretty speeches. Ella exerted herself to the utmost, and was cheerful, if not gay, and affectionate as of old to her friend. The servants had been presented with new clothes, and little Françoise was in tears of delight at miladi's splendour. The wedding was simply prosaic, as any wedding must have been with such a bridegroom.

"My dear Kitty," Sir George said, as they sat down to breakfast, "do gather up your dress a little. Don't you see how the servants keep treading on it?"

Then he turned to Lady Gardiner, who was sitting next him, and added, smiling—

“It is high time that this young lady had some one to look after her, you see.”

All this was harmless and well meant, but, coupled with a dozen remarks of the same kind, fidgeted the others, and took the bloom off the occasion. When the adieux were being made, and Mr Tyrrell waited at the door to hand Kitty into the carriage, Sir George cried out in a shrill key, “My dear, we must take our old cotton umbrellas with us. The idea of mountaineering without cotton umbrellas! *Francine, cherchez les ombrelles de coton.*”

And *Francine*, who was to accompany her mistress, rushed hither and thither, and Matthew, the man-servant, helped her. The old cotton umbrellas were not to be found—the women-servants having hidden them away, in honour of the wedding. There was no alternative but to go without them, and Kitty felt thankful to be fairly off.

“We’ll buy some good stout cheap umbrellas as soon as ever we get to Gibraltar,” were Sir George’s first words; “but, really, the culpable negligence of those servants is quite terrible. They have no sort of respect for property whatever.”

“Shabby property,” Kitty said, smiling.

“Exactly; of all snobs under the sun, the worst are footmen and ladies’-maids. There’s one comfort, you are a sensible woman, and have been used to

simple ways of living; so we can do with the least possible number of them. Is it necessary to keep Francine—Ella's maid could surely wait on you both?"

Kitty smiled at this, and laid one little hand on Sir George's arm, and scolded him playfully.

"Of course I wish you to have everything becoming your position," he answered. "I'm sure if ever a man was ready to make a fool of himself for a woman, I am for you—ah! here we are at the harbour. And there's the yacht all ready. How pleasant it is to have a yacht lent one!"

The day was superb. The sky was a canopy of soft purple; the sea smooth as a lake in summer-time; the distant mountains, of loveliest shape and colour.

In honour of the bride and bridegroom, the little yacht hoisted colours, a crimson carpet was laid down on deck, and an awning of the same colour put up. Garlands of flowers hung from the main-yard. The sailors wore gala dress and white rosettes, and a little negro boy presented Kitty with a bouquet as she stepped on board.

Kitty's cheeks flushed with pleasure at this reception, and Sir George was evidently much gratified, though, he whispered to his bride, "he should be compelled to give a pretty penny in drink-money to the men, which was a drawback."

On the whole he liked it. Certainly a bridal

trip could hardly have been more auspicious or poetic. The *Undine* was a delightful little craft, and skimmed the waves gracefully as a bird. Dainty little fishing-boats, with sails shaped like butterflies' wings, kept her company. Her path lay along a bright blue sea, in sight of hills brighter and bluer still. There was enough solitude to inspire dreams, and yet not enough to inspire melancholy. But Kitty's bridal trip was utterly unpoetic. Sir George could not have been kinder, and more cheerful; he could not have exerted himself more assiduously to amuse her. He had simply nothing poetic in his nature.

"I don't think I ever felt in better humour," he said, as they paced the deck arm-in-arm. "I suppose nothing puts a man in a better humour with himself and the world in general than acting up to his convictions. Now, I'm not a selfish man by disposition; but, of course, at first sight, it did seem that to marry you would be a little imprudent, especially on dear Ella's account."

"Ella has behaved beautifully," Kitty said.

"She has indeed—the darling! But I hope and trust that she will have her reward. There was no other way to keep the property together except for me to marry, and it is greatly to Ella's interest that the property should be kept together. You have so much good sense," he added, "that I don't mind dwelling on the practical side of things,

though you know well enough that I should never have dreamed of marrying again, had I not been over head and ears in love."

Kitty smiled, too much accustomed to Sir George's good-natured self-glorification to take any fresh outburst of it amiss; and he went on—

"And you shall not repent of the step you have taken. I am nearly fifty, it is true, and you are barely half as old; but a girl is often happier for marrying a man of experience, whom she can look up to; I certainly do not look my age?"

"Oh no!"

"How was it," he continued, "that you were not married long ago? A handsome, high-spirited girl like yourself must have had lovers, no matter how much you might lack other good things of this world."

Kitty blushed, and confessed that she had not been without lovers.

"And you liked me the best! Was that it?" he said, patting the little hand that rested on his arm.

"I suppose so," Kitty answered, with a little laugh. Sir George's queer, self-satisfied love-making struck her, perforce, as a comical surprise now and then.

"Well, under the circumstances, I commend your taste. But didn't I hear something from Ella, and from your friend Mrs Wingfield, about Dr Norman's fancy for you?"

Kitty confessed that Dr Norman was fain to make her his wife.

"I must say I wonder that you refused him. He's a deucedly good-looking fellow, and a good fellow, I should say, though he was particularly unpleasant to me."

"The best people become unpleasant when they are jealous," said Kitty, artfully; and then she led the conversation into other channels. Somehow she could not talk of her lovers to the man who was her husband.

When Sir George went aft to smoke a cigar with the captain, Kitty began thinking. She had been inclined just now to compare Sir George to Dr Norman, to the disparagement of the former, saying to herself—"Look on this picture and on that!" but she checked the thought with sudden shame. Putting comparisons aside, how straightforward and sincere had Sir George's behaviour been to her all along! It was not his fault if he lacked Dr Norman's intellectual strength and nobility of character; it was not his fault if he lacked Dr Norman's pleasant looks and dignified carriage. Sir George had wooed and won her in perfect good faith; pretending to no gifts and graces that he did not possess, never seeking to shield his faults or shortcomings from her observation; never assuming virtues that he lacked, or promising more than he could perform.

He had married her simply because he loved

and admired her. By such a marriage he gained no worldly advantages, and sacrificed some; he was as good to her as it was in his nature to be.

And her own conduct?

She confessed that it would not bear such close scrutiny as his. It was a comforting thought that he trusted her so entirely, and had no idea of any conscious self-sacrifice in her part of the compact. He knew little of her outward history, nothing of her inner existence; and he would never know. She had written new chronicles over those dear pages of her old life inscribed with Perry's and Dr Norman's name—the first a poem, the second a scripture; and if at times a tear fell over the palimpsest, no prying eyes should see her weep.

How far off and distant the old life and the old loves seemed to her now! She had never before looked upon them as vanished beyond recall; but now, by her marriage, they had become so without a doubt. Well, the last would suffer no more at her hands; and the first had been embittered by the consciousness of wrong! And she should rest on her oars at last.

What must occupy her mind now was the duty she owed to Sir George, by whom rest, ease, and contentment—as she thought—had come. She determined to make his life happier if she could, and to be to him in all things a true and loving wife.

He came up to her, all smiles and good-humour, accompanied by the captain, who was desirous of paying his respects to Lady Bartelotte. Kitty found him a delightful person, and forgot all painful retrospection for a time in the sensation of her newly-acquired dignity.

Yes, it was certainly pleasant to be Lady Bartelotte. She thought she had chosen the right casket.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE BOHEMIAN WEDDING.

HAVING obtained Dr Norman's consent to his suit, Perry could not rest till he had mooted the subject of marriage. There was no sort of moderation in the young man's character; and the more easily did he obtain his inch, the more fractiously did he demand his ell. He was, as he said, growing a little tired of shams;—"and soap and water," Mrs Cornford would put in wickedly. Whereupon Perry declared that he liked soap and water well enough when not forced upon him, especially in cold weather.

"Well, well," rejoined Polly, "marry as soon as you can, if you can't marry as soon as you like. But you know that the devil's in an empty purse, and I fear that's the condition of yours."

Perry hit on a scheme. He sold the picture which had been intended to awaken terrors in Kitty's guilty mind to a strolling-player—who exhibited it in the provinces as *The Avenged Lover*. He cleared out his studio of every marketable sketch and study he could well spare, and as much *bric-à-brac* as he could bring his mind to part with. He sold his Spanish cloak, his Arab horse-trappings, his least valuable photographs and engravings. He borrowed a hundred pounds on his half-finished Academy picture. Then he seized Dr Norman by the button one Saturday evening and spoke out. He had a little money, he said, with which to furnish a house. Laura's requirements were as modest as his own. Surely Dr Norman could now say nothing against the marriage?

Dr Norman knew not how to resist the young man's pleading; and Perry, having forced in the thin end of the wedge, by a well-directed tap or two, secured it firmly.

He had seen the announcement of Kitty's marriage to Sir George Bartelotte in the newspaper, and if the iron did not enter into his soul, something very much akin to malice took possession of his heart. Poor Perry was by nature as harmless a being as Heaven had ever created; but would not an angel have resented Kitty's conduct? His first impulse, therefore, was a pure, unalloyed, childish feeling of spitefulness.

Kitty had trodden upon him as if he had been

a worm. He would show her, forthwith, that there were poorer creatures than he in the world, and that others held in esteem the abject thing she despised. So, for once in his life he painted zealously; and the result was the completion of his Academy picture.

Before the paint was fairly dry, he sent out Mary Hann for a cab, and drove off with his picture to the Addison Road in triumph.

"If that does not bring the doctor round," he said to Polly Cornford, "nothing will;" and Polly said she thought it would bring the doctor round.

"Please forgive my untidy appearance," Perry said to Dr Norman; "I was too anxious to have your opinion and Laura's of my picture, to think of anything else."

And the picture was advantageously placed in Laura's little drawing-room, and warm and hearty were the acclamations of his critics. It was a delightful picture; not perfect by any means, for Perry was as yet too impatient to do anything perfectly; but it was delightful in the sense of being informed with fresh, untired, passionate genius. Dr Norman's faith in Perry—which had been a little shaken of late by the undue earnestness the young man threw into the most trifling things—now rose.

"It is a good picture; and I congratulate you, Mr Perugino," he said; "with your gifts, you ought to rise to a very high position in your art."

"Such is my ambition, sir," Perry answered. Then, finding himself alone with his future father-in-law, he added, with great gravity—"But a man is sure to lag behind others so long as he remains a bachelor."

And he replied to all Dr Norman's arguments with such winning sophisms, and Dr Norman remembered his own early marriage with so much tenderness, that at last his scruples gave way.

"I have told you all along," he said, "that my child has no portion."

"Oh, sir, as if I expected that"——

"But you might reasonably have expected it, had things gone well with me. All, however, that lies in my power to do will I do most gladly. You and Laura will naturally begin housekeeping on a small scale"——

"I am sure we should be happy in a two-pair back in Seven Dials," Perry said, with fervour.

"I don't agree with you there. But I will allow Laura a hundred a year, and a little money to help to furnish a house, and you must do the rest."

Perry was in raptures.

"I trust, when you commit yourself to Laura's keeping, that she will take care of your health," the doctor added kindly. "I fear you have been shutting yourself up too much of late."

Perry confessed that he had been imprudent for the last fortnight, but promised to be more careful

in future, and made a secret vow to think twice before encountering Laura's father in broad daylight. The truth of the matter was that his present life was a feverish one. He led a dual existence—loving Laura with his better self, hating Kitty with his worst; and naturally the unhealthy moral diet disagreed with him. And—must it be confessed?—our poor Perry differed sadly from ordinary heroes of fiction in the matter of sinews and muscular perfection. Gifted and graceful as he was, he possessed neither lofty stature, nor Herculean strength, nor muscles of iron; and as his habits were sedentary and unwholesome in the extreme, he did not acquire what Nature had failed to bestow. He returned to Polly in a state of exultation bordering on frenzy.

“Kitty couldn't marry me because I was a poor devil,” he cried; “and I'm good enough for sweet Laura Norman, who has a hundred a year! Give me a slip of paper, Polly, and I'll write out the announcement of our wedding for the *Times*, for Lady Bartelotte to see.”

“The doctor is willing, then?” asked Polly.

“My dear Polly, Dr Norman is a brick—God bless him! And look ye, Polly, he's going to furnish a house for us, so I can pay you the fifty pounds you lent me ages ago—in the glacial period.”

“Hoity-toity-toity-tum!” said Polly. “I'm sure

the world must be coming to an end when you begin to pay your debts."

Perry had seated himself at the table, and began to write—

"At the parish church of Kensington, on the —th inst., Perugino Neeve, Esquire"——

"Son of the late Perugino Neeve, Esquire, H.M.W.P.," put in Mrs Cornford, "which means Walking Poster to Her Majesty's Theatre. Never be ashamed of thy father, or of his trade, Perugino."

"—At the parish church of Kensington," repeated Perry, impatiently, "on the —th inst., Perugino Neeve, Esq.——O Polly, if I had only a handle to my name!"

"Well, you have taken the degree of A.S.S., I'm sure—put that."

Perry went on very gravely—"What about the address?"

"Put Montgomery Lodge, or The Cedars, or something equally fine," Polly said; "for if you live in a seven-roomed house now-a-days, it is sure to have a name fit for a mansion."

"I'll leave out the address for the present, and go on—— 'Perugino Neeve, Esq., to Laura, eldest daughter of Edward Norman, LL.D., F.R.S., &c., &c., of Shelley House, Kent, and Muir Cottage, Kensington.' What will Lady Bartelotte say to that, I wonder?"

"As if it mattered to you? You're mighty lucky to get such a wife and such a father-in-law,

and shouldn't trouble your head any more about Kitty than if you had never seen her."

"That is true, Polly," Perry said, seriously, and straightway he threw the announcement of his marriage in the fire.

Meantime, Laura was preparing for her new home as joyfully and shyly as a young bird that is enticed away from the parental nest.

"I don't deserve you in the least," Perry said to her, "but I will work like a slave for you."

"As if I wanted you to do that!" Laura made answer, her blue eyes shining with happiness.

"But I shall do it; I mean to get rich for your sake, though I know we should be happy in the dingiest alley in the Isle of Dogs."

Thus Perry talked and Laura listened, assenting to everything, believing in everything; and for the first time Mr Perugino woke up to find himself an oracle!

He had once proposed to Dr Norman that they should spend the first year or two of their married life in Italy; but to this Dr Norman firmly objected. He would do everything, he said, to promote Perry's wishes by and by; it was surely not unreasonable that he should like to have his young daughter near him for a little while longer.

So a tiny house was selected, overlooking the gardens of old Campden House, which Laura and Prissy proceeded to furnish with the three hundred pounds Dr Norman had given for the purpose.

For a time Perry was in his element painting cornices, hanging pictures and brackets, doing, in fact, the work of carpenter and artistic decorator to perfection. He conveyed all his prettiest treasures to his new home; and what with Dr Norman's money, and Perry's good taste, Laura's little drawing-room was as charming as any young artist's wife could desire. One obstacle Perry had to overcome. The house was small, and had no good-sized room with a north light. He should be obliged to paint all his large subjects in the old studio at Polly Cornford's for the present. Dr Norman demurred, and Laura looked greatly vexed; but at last the matter was happily settled in this way: Dr Norman promised to buy the house as soon as he could afford it, and Perry was bound over to build a studio for himself.

Was ever a wedding in reality anything but dismal? Dr Norman did not know till the time came what it would cost him to lose his little girl; and Laura's gentle heart was full of bitter self-reproach, thinking of the little she had done to make him happy, and of the wonderful undeserved happiness that he had bestowed upon her. Perry, perhaps, suffered more from inward struggle than any, since it was the first time in his life that he stood pledged to a duty. He kept saying to himself—I can make Laura happy, and I will do so, though all that was best in me I gave to Kitty long ago. But he felt ashamed and sorrowful at

not being made quite happy by Laura's pure adoring love. When they started for their wedding trip to Cornwall, the two other guests took their leave, and Dr Norman and Prissy were left alone.

Miss Prissy was full of the wedding. Had papa noticed what an ugly man the clergyman was, and how he stumbled at the name Perugino? Dr Norman had not noticed.

Well, had papa noticed what a big coat Perry wore, and, oh! so creased? (Perry's new coat was not forthcoming in time, so he was married in one of his friend Carrington's.)

No, Dr Norman had not noticed that either.

"O, papa! where could your eyes have been? But you must have heard the pew-opener whisper to the old woman next her—'My! isn't she a bonnie one?' meaning Laura? and the old woman answered—'He licks her!' meaning, I suppose, papa, that Perry was the handsomest."

To that speech Prissy elicited a monosyllabic answer only. Then she went up to her father coaxingly, and said—

"But why do you look so grave, papa?"

For Dr Norman's face had been growing sadder and sadder, and at the sound of the loving little voice, and the touch of the caressing little hand, his composure gave way. It was not so much the loss of Laura that made him feel desolate, as the thought that they had been so little to each other, and that she could leave him so willingly. He

had hardly felt so forlorn since, years ago, he had gone from the chamber of his dead wife to tell his little ones that they had no mother.

“O Prissy,” he cried, taking the child in his arms and weeping over her, “be very good to me, or my heart will break.”

CHAPTER LXVI.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

KITTY found her honeymoon endurable, but none the less did she long for it to come to an end. She said to herself that she should be perfectly happy when once she had settled down into the position of Sir George's wife, with recognised duties and a recognised sphere. It was all very well for foolish young lovers to have honeymoons; but what had she and her husband to do with sentiment and romance? He declared that he was frantically in love with her; and the assertion seemed true, as far as the deed could certify the word. He had made her his wife. Love could go no farther. Kitty was schooling herself into gratitude to her husband from morning till night. If he looked concerned when she took a little cold, or if he laid out a few francs on any trifle she had admired, she would say—

“How good you are! How good you are!”

And this sort of appreciation delighted him. He felt conscious of his goodness towards her; but then virtue is not always its own reward, and he coveted the reward.

They talked a good deal of Ella in these days. How generous had her conduct been, how candid, how loving! There was nothing they would not do by way of rewarding her. Sir George took a solemn resolution never to thwart her wishes again. Kitty proclaimed herself Ella's debtor as long as they both should live.

One thing struck Kitty.

Why was it that they should both recognise the necessity of irsisting upon this devotion to Ella? She did not doubt them. She did not ask more affection at their hands than they were wont to give. She forgave them for the temporary suffering they had caused her.

Could it be that this marriage was already looming between father and daughter, friend and friend? Kitty's moral perception was as acute as her practical morality was lax. The thought that Ella, whom she had loved next to Perry better than anything in the world, should lose one iota of her father's affection through her, was intolerable. That she and Ella should ever become other than the firm friends they were, was hardly less so.

She longed impatiently to be with Ella again, and assure herself that all was well. Ella's letters

were loving as ever and quite gay; but even the most truthful people will at times write happier letters than circumstances warrant.

"Dear Ella writes word that we must soon go back," she said one morning to Sir George. "What do you say, dear?"

Happy, happy Sir George! to have Kitty by his side always, accosting him in this loving, wife-like strain—Kitty to rejoice his eyes all day long—Kitty trying to please him whether he were moodish or content, grave or gay. What would not some others have given for the priceless boon he took much as a matter of course?

He was reading his letters when Kitty spoke to him, and finished a long sentence before looking up.

"You said something, I think, my dear?" he said.

"Ella says she must have us back again soon, or"—

"Read what she says," Sir George answered.

Kitty read the following—

"You must come back again very soon. We have done our best to amuse ourselves, but miss you both all the same. The Gardiners take the greatest care of me"—

"I'll be bound she has invited the whole family to stay with her. A pretty expense!" growled the baronet. "But go on."

"And Mr Tyrrell is delightful"—

"Do you know what I have thought for some time past?" Sir George cried, looking lively on a sudden,—*"Tyrrell is in love with Ella."*

"But Ella will never marry," Kitty said; "she has said so a hundred times."

"Young ladies don't marry till they're asked by somebody they find delightful," Sir George answered, with a chuckle of satisfaction at having been himself found delightful. "And Tyrrell has five or six thousand a-year. Ella might do worse."

"Do you wish Ella to marry?" Kitty asked, opening her large eyes.

"I never have wished it before, nor do I now, except for her own sake. It was in the nature of things that my marriage should make me wish it. But read a little more. I am amused."

Kitty continued to read Ella's letter:—

"Mr Tyrrell is delightful, and not a day passes but we are indebted to him for some pleasant surprise in the shape of new excursions, new music, new sketches, or new books. I do think, Kitty, that his versatility is on the surface only and that"—Kitty stopped on a sudden, and put the letter back in its envelope.

"Ladies don't like to have their letters to each other read aloud," she said, smiling; "and though Ella and I have no secrets, we are afraid of such sharp criticism as yours."

Sir George laughed, and threw his own letters across the table to her.

"Don't betray poor Ella's confidence, on any account; but answer those letters for me, there's a good child, and tell Ella when you write that we cannot possibly bring our honeymoon to an end yet."

Kitty looked up with an expression of disappointment.

"Why not do Tyrrell and Ella a good turn, and leave them to make love in peace? We should only spoil the thing."

Kitty acquiesced of course, and did her best to seem pleased, though she was dying to be away, and fairly on the road to England. It ought to have flattered her vanity, if it did not touch her heart, that Sir George could so entirely content himself with her society. She chafed at his easy complacent mood instead, and wanted him to feel something of her own impatience, forgetting that, whereas marriage had wholly altered the tenor of her own life, it affected his very little. He was delighted to have a young, handsome, and submissive wife, and regarded the alliance as a great achievement; but there, for the present, the matter ended. He hoped and prayed every Sunday in church—for Sir George was an exemplary church-goer—that the blessing always desired by husbands should fall on his marriage. Beyond this he had no ambitions. Kitty had a thousand.

Of what use were parks and mansions and titles except to be enjoyed? Of what use was her wit,

unless she moved in the world; or her beauty, unless there were eyes to delight in it? Partly from imagination, and partly from such fashionable life as novel-reading had made familiar to her, she drew a picture of her future, and delighted to dwell on it. She was to be a leader of fashion in London, a Lady Bountiful in the country, a patroness of poor artists, and a beneficent, happy, ruling spirit in any society among which she might find herself. Hitherto her career had been successful beyond her expectations. She looked very far forward, undoubting, as of old.

Six weeks passed—to Kitty's thinking the six dullest weeks of her life—and then they returned home.

"Well," Sir George said, as they came within sight of the villa, "I can honestly say that I never spent a happier time in my life. I hope you are of the same manner of thinking, my dear?"

"Have I looked otherwise than happy?" Kitty asked.

"I think you have had just a touch of melancholy now and then. But that is quite becoming. Every right-minded young lady is a little melancholy after her marriage; as, indeed, she well may be, for marriage is a most serious thing—most serious," Sir George added. "A good Christian woman will then look into her heart, and see how far she is fitted for the solemn responsibilities of wife, mother, and citizen"—

Fortunately for Kitty the monologue was interrupted by a chorus of welcoming voices. They had come suddenly upon Ella and the Gardiners, grouped on the lawn; and after a great deal of hand-shaking, and a little kissing among the ladies, all went in-doors to partake of tea. After a little time, Ella and Kitty were left alone. Kitty went up to her friend, hung over her, kissed her, clasped her hand, and seemed fain to cry of joy.

"I am so glad to be with you again, my darling," she said. "Have they taken good care of you? Have you been happy?"

"Everybody has been very good to me," Ella answered. "The six weeks have slipped away, I hardly know how."

"Ah!" Kitty cried, reproachfully, "then you did not miss me much?"

"I have indeed missed you," Ella said, trying to look cheerful; "but was it not right to begin learning my hard lesson at once? You belong to papa now, and cannot devote all your time to me."

"As if I should ever love you less dearly!"

"As if I doubted your affection or my own, dear Kitty. It would, nevertheless, be unreasonable to claim the thought and self-sacrifice you once gave me. Papa must be first in your eyes, and you first in his, you know."

She said this smiling, though with underlying sadness in her voice, and changed the subject. Had Kitty found Ronda so very beautiful? Had

she and Sir George decided upon returning to England soon? Should they stay in London for a little while? Was Akenholme to be repaired, and put in order, etcetera? Kitty answering with a blank face.

By and by, the conversation fell back into the old channel; and it was Kitty's turn to ask questions.

"Mr. Tyrrell has been here a great deal?" she asked.

"More than ever. What is to be done?" Ella said, with comic dismay.

Kitty laughed.

"Mr. Tyrrell is delightful!" she said. "Perfectly delightful!—And very fond of you?"

"So it seems."

"And you are fond of him?"

"Not in equal proportion, I think," Ella answered. "But he has been so good to me whilst you were away, that it is only natural I should wish to be good to him. He must, however, have patience."

Just then Sir George came in. Would Kitty be so good as to go and find such and such a packet for him? The servants were far too stupid. And then, would she order the dinner to be a little earlier? He was so hungry. Thirdly, would she help him with his letters for half an hour? He must send off several to England that evening.

Of course Kitty complied. Formerly Ella would have said, "Dear papa, I am sure all these things can wait till poor Kitty is rested a little." But now Ella perforce must hold her peace.

Kitty hardly knew how it was that these first days of her return seemed vexatious. Sir George was kind; Ella was affectionate; things went on smoothly in the house; yet she could have cried of sheer weariness from day to day. She accounted for such fits of chagrin in this way—"I am so childish and little-minded as to be piqued by the fact of Ella having a lover, and seeing daily and hourly how Mr Tyrrell has usurped my supremacy and my influence. But is not this behaving like a school-girl? Ought not a lover to usurp the first place, leaving the second for a friend?"

It was not likely that Kitty's introspection should go deeper than this. We do not play the moralist to ourselves; and even had another spoken the plain though subtle truth to her, she would have gone away unbelieving. For the truth must have been this: Kitty and Ella could no longer sympathise with each other, no longer love each other, no longer delight in each other as before, simply because the less noble nature had knowingly, if not wilfully, wronged the nobler; and the wrong, though pardoned, was inevitably working out its retribution in self-abasement. We cannot completely love or be completely loved by those whose loftiest principles we have outraged.

CHAPTER LXVII.

LADY BARTELOTTE IS INTRODUCED.

AN English spring was not to be thought of for Ella; and as Malaga had become monotonous of late, the little party journeyed to Cannes, where it was proposed to stay till April.

Cannes is eminently a gay place. Pic-nics, luncheons, dinners, and balls, succeed each other without intermission; and Kitty and Ella entered with zest into as much society as Sir George would countenance. Kitty wanted to see what fashionable life was like, and whether she should be as successful in it as she had been in such phases of life as were familiar to her. Ella's motives were purely unselfish. She saw in the distractions of intelligent society Kitty's only chance of happiness, and did all in her power to get Kitty introduced and welcomed into the choicest coteries.

There was a certain Lady Adela C——, whose house was one of the most pleasant places of afternoon resort; and it was Ella's achievement to get Kitty graciously received by her. Lady Adela might be called really a distinguished woman, and her house in Paris was frequented not only by princes and nobles, but by men of learning and women of genius. She had the happy art of filtering society so delicately that the finest sense could never detect a gross element in the stream she

kept flowing about her. And the stream sparkled and glowed like a fountain with a rainbow playing on it, reflecting as it did so many bright and harmonious minds.

Hitherto, Kitty had outshone Ella in society, which was hardly wonderful, since the one possessed twice as many, and twice as striking personal attractions, and strove to shine; whilst the other ever hid herself in some quiet corner, and watched the animated masses around her, as a looker-on only.

Kitty, accompanied by Sir George and Ella, had come for the first time to one of Lady Adela's crowded afternoon parties. The ubiquitous Tyrrell, was there, of course. He knew Lady Adela of old, and had somewhat mischievously rejoiced at the idea of Kitty being introduced to her. He no longer sat at Kitty's feet—if indeed he had ever done so—and longed to see the tables turned for once, and Ella outshining her for a little space.

Lady Adela was as shrewd as could possibly be, and detected pretence, veneer, and flattering acquiescence at once. He felt sure she would have no sympathy and very limited admiration for Kitty.

She received her visitors in a charming south room, opening upon a garden full of coloured gladioli, and other brilliant flowers, which burned like flames against the deep blue sea. Leading out of this were other rooms, one a music-room,

&c.; and after a little talk with their host, the guests dispersed themselves, and selected conversation or music and croquet, according to taste. But Kitty and Ella, being strangers, were taken especial care of, and were introduced to a great many of Lady Adela's friends.

Later in the afternoon Mr Tyrrell entered, and at an exultant glance saw how matters stood.

There was Ella, his dainty Ella, dressed in simple white muslin sitting away from the crowd, as utterly oblivious of self as a child. Gathered round her were Lady Adela, with two or three of the most interesting and distinguished persons in the room; and they were holding an animated conversation about art, which Mr Tyrrell would fain have joined, but feared to interrupt.

And where was Kitty?

Lady Bartelotte, who had come superbly dressed in the latest fashion, and who was sure to have done her best to please, and be pleased, sat in the dullest room surrounded by two or three officers from Gibraltar, and some very young ladies, the most insignificant people of the whole company.

Extreme youth is a somewhat unmanageable element in society, unless left to itself. Kitty's companions had been obliged to give up croquet on account of the heat, and she was trying to amuse them. Mr Tyrrell, seeing that she looked bored, charitably sat down beside her, and after a little conversation, brought from a side-table a

large basket of cartes-de-visite of dead and living celebrities, those invaluable aids to lagging talk.

He took up a handful, "Greek Brigands, the Emperor Theodore, Pio Nono, Bismarck, and Martin Tupper! It reminds me of the Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel," he said, laughing.

And then he proposed a game of his own invention with the cartes-de-visite, in which the young ladies and gentlemen joined delightedly. The photographs were numbered minus so much, or plus so much, according to the writer's estimation; and when each card was drawn, the drawer had to pay or receive, as the case might be, negligence being punished by forfeits; a dish of sugar-plums and bonbons from the tea-room being appropriated as counters.

In the midst of the game Kitty drew a card that made her change colour and pause. It was the portrait of Dr Norman, and Mr Tyrrell had written in the corner, 'plus thousand,' the highest number awarded.

"Why do you look so shocked, Lady Bartelotte?" exclaimed Mr Tyrrell. "Is it the portrait of Mr Swinburne, Home the spiritualist, or La Soeur Patrocínio?"

"No," Kitty said, very slowly. "This is a portrait of no celebrity, but of a private gentleman, an old friend of mine. It must be here by mistake."

"Dr Norman no celebrity!" cried Tyrrell, with animation. "That comes of living so much abroad, Lady Bartelotte. But you must know Dr Norman has been doing great things in science of late, and will be ranked among the Herschells, and Tyndalls, and Lyells of the day. Do pass round his portrait."

Then the portrait was criticised and admired; and Mr Tyrrell fetched a certain French Professor from the next room, that Kitty might have some talk with him about her old friend. Lady Adela soon came in with her party, and she desired the Professor to recommence the story for their benefit, adding—

"Lady Bartelotte is indeed an enviable person to know Dr Norman so well; and when the Professor has done, we must beg for her story."

The Professor had just come from England, and told in a few sentences the purport of Dr Norman's lectures at the Royal Institution, which he had heard, and the great effect produced by them in the scientific world. Then he gave a touching sketch of a certain odd little daughter of Dr Norman's, a child of eleven or twelve, who could not control her unbounded enthusiasm at the end of his last lecture, and kissed him as he stood among his congratulating friends, much to his embarrassment.

Poor Kitty answered the eager questions put to her in a very bald fashion indeed. For the life

of her she could not give an animated account of Dr Norman and his family. She heard all sorts of kind and sympathetic things said about him; she heard of the congratulations that he had received from high quarters; she heard of his face being praised for its sweet, noble, earnest expression, with cold acquiescence and inward mortification, and was thankful when Lady Adela proposed tea, and that the little group broke up.

But she did not forget Dr Norman's portrait. That he should create such an excitement among fashionable circles she could not at all understand. She recalled him as she had known him in the old days at Shelley House—prematurely old, a little absent, a little old-fashioned, to her thinking, and quite regardless of appearances. It seemed preposterous that such a man should have anything in common with Lady Adela's set. She cast her eyes about the room, and thought how out of place he would have looked among these fashionable men and women. A certain French prince of the Imperial family had conducted her to the refreshment-room; the lady chatting to her was a peer's daughter, and of the bluest blood in England. Sir George was holding a young marquis by the button. The reception of Dr Norman's history by Lady Adela's guests puzzled her, and set her thinking! Should she ever meet him? Was there, after all, so little difference between his rank and that of her husband? Had social degradation

ceased to exist, as Sir George often declared to be the case in his anti-democratic speeches? It was not that she envied Dr Norman's success—it was doubt in her own that made her uneasy.

This first experience of fashionable society on a large scale had disappointed her. She wondered whether as Dr Norman's wife she would have found herself of so little account?

Sir George here came up and introduced his friend to her. A walk round the pretty gardens with them dispelled Kitty's grave thoughts for a time; then the little party returned home.

"How well Popham is looking!" Sir George said to Ella. "And did you have any talk with our neighbours, the Vernons?"

"With the Colonel, yes," Ella answered; "but Cecilia was not there, and I don't know the other daughters."

"It was a pleasant party. How did you enjoy it, my dear?" asked Sir George of Kitty.

"It amused me," Kitty said, "but I shall like the next better. One feels a little lost among such crowds of strangers for the first time."

"True, true."

Then Sir George told Ella of other old friends he had met, and Kitty fell into a train of reflections. It was natural that Ella and Sir George should find plenty to say to each other about former acquaintances, yet she could not help taking it amiss, and chafing at her new sense of isolation.

Among such little circles as they had formed at Fontainebleau, Arcachon, and Malaga, she was ever the moving spirit, and the misgiving for the first time crossed her mind whether her supremacy was not already a thing of the past.

Kitty was like Ulysses. She would rather rule in Ithaca than serve on Olympus. She would rather be first of a small coterie than of little account among crowds.

How would it be in England? She awaited the future, if not as ambitiously, at least as uneasily, as of old.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

MRS PERUGINO "AT HOME."

DR NORMAN gave his first lecture about a fortnight after Laura's return home. The brilliant success of which Mr Tyrrell had spoken came later, but his opening paper was far too novel and telling to meet with a lukewarm reception. He felt anxious that his little Laura should share the good things of fortune that might fall to him, and determined to call on his way home. Putting Prissy under the protection of a friend, he took a cab to Fortescue Terrace—so pretentiously was the little street called—arriving thither soon after ten o'clock. It happened that Dr Norman had forgotten the

number of the house, though he remembered its physiognomy perfectly well. So he dismissed his cab at the top of the street, and looked out carefully for the particular little garden with its miniature rock-work, for the antique lamp with which Mr Perugino had adorned his hall, and for other signs peculiar to him.

"What noisy neighbours Laura has!" thought Dr Norman, as he walked along very slowly. "I hope this quiet little spot will not turn out to be less desirable than we first thought it!"

For a loud chorus proceeded from the lower end of the street, and the burden of the song was one made too familiar some years ago by hand-organ, hurdy-gurdies, and street-singers, namely, "Villikins and his Dinah." Now, if ever a comic song was harmless, it is this said "Villikins and his Dinah," and yet there is something unspeakably vagabondish and roystering in the "Too-roolo-too-roolo-do" of the refrain.

When the sight of the well-known lamp arrested Dr Norman's steps, he was dismayed to find that the noise here reached its culminating point. He paused—he listened. The singing proceeded from Laura's drawing-room beyond a doubt.

His first impulse was to turn back in sorrow, anger, and shame. Had Perry already broken his promise of forsaking former habits and former friends? Was this the sort of distraction he deemed fit for a refined young wife? And from such a

beginning what might be expected in days to come?

On second thoughts he determined to enter and judge for himself. Surely Laura and Perry would wish their home to be freely open to him always! And, after all, there might be no real harm in the mirth which, to him, seemed so offensive.

He knocked, his own familiar knock, boldly, and the door was immediately opened. But by whom?

Dr Norman naturally felt a little startled by the appearance of a tall and striking-looking Hindoo woman, who wore her native costume, and no insignificant display of trinkets. She looked as if she had just served as a model for some Oriental subject, and, indeed, such was the case. Since Perry's return from Algiers, he could never be sufficiently reminded, as he grandiosely said, of barbaric splendour and Eastern beauty; so the woman—who was a very respectable person, married to one of her own people—had been engaged from Mrs Cornford's studio to help at Laura's first "At Home."

Perry had insisted upon the necessity of giving Polly Cornford and some of "the fellows" one little supper, adding—

"There is no occasion for us to ask 'em again, but it would be the height of ingratitude not to let 'em see what a wife I have got, and what a snug little house my brick of a father-in-law has given us!"

Thus it came about that Polly Cornford, Crosbie Carrington, Vittoria's unmarried sister Theresina, Vittoria and her husband, and another friend of Perry's, had been invited to Laura's little "At Home."

When Dr Norman entered the drawing-room, and saw of whom the company was composed, his heart grew lighter.

"I'm afraid we frightened you with our Too—roo—loo—do, Doctor?" said Mrs Cornford, gaily; "but a comic song is only a sermon turned upside down, you know; and if we must be moral in this world, we may as well be merry over it. Shall we give you another?"

"Papa would like to hear Perry play something of Mendelsohn's best," Laura began, nervously. "Perry, dear, will you play to papa?"

"I must look at Perugino's new picture first," Dr Norman said, and went up to the easel; for of course Laura's little drawing-room was turned into a studio on Perry's idle days.

"Oh, it is nothing," Perry answered—"a mere peak. I said I would imitate G——" (naming one of our leading painters), "and I did it. I shall begin to work steadily next week. But you must see what Laura has done."

"Oh no, Perry!" Laura cried, shyly.

But Perry persisted in bringing out a little picture of Laura's; and the quietude of the house was again disturbed. "Huzza! Mrs Neeve!" cried

the gentlemen. "Hurra! bravo! Laura!" cried the ladies, clapping their hands. Poor Dr Norman retreated to a chair, stunned with the unaccustomed noise.

There was a lull, and Laura talked about the lecture; and Dr Norman asked her to bring Perry to dinner the next day, to meet some friends. When Perry had played a little, supper was announced. Dr Norman gave Mrs Cornford his arm, and the little party descended.

Poor Laura looked across the table, envying Perry's happy unconcern, and dreading every moment lest something should occur to shock her father's sense of propriety. The very supper, too, was so unlike anything to which she had been accustomed at home. What would he think of it? Perry had ordered it himself, and of course Perry knew what his friends liked; but Dr Norman's taste was another thing.

"We dined early, papa," she said, apologetically, "which accounts for such substantial dishes"—

"Well," Polly Cornford cried, "I'm not ashamed to confess that when invited out to a supper I can depend on, I go without my dinner; it saves my pocket and compliments my friends."

"Bravo! Polly!" cried Perry, rapping his fingers on the table—"bravo!"

Laura crimsoned, but Dr Norman did his best to reassure her, by appearing at ease with her visitors.

"I commend your plan, Mrs Cornford," he said, "but I could not adopt it unless my friends supped somewhat earlier."

"As to the matter of that," said Polly, "there's nothing like art to give one a handy sort of appetite. We artists never think about our dinners if we've got a good model or a good light, and feel in painting humour, but just snatch a mouthful and bide our time. I can honestly say that there isn't an hour from twelve in the morning to twelve at night which doesn't perfectly suit me for the business of dinner. But, help the lobster, my good Perry, whilst your wife carves the chickens; and I'll mix the salad"——

"Won't you begin with a bit of chicken, or steak?" Laura asked.

"The fact is," Perry said, comically, "it has just been discovered in the kitchen that we are short of oil and vinegar; and the cook has had to run to Number Nine to borrow the cruet-stand. We lent 'em our Stilton cheese for a luncheon last week, so it is only an interchange of civilities."

"Perry!" cried Laura, looking greatly vexed, "you should not let your guests see what a bad housekeeper I am."

"When the fact is taken into consideration that we've only been housekeeping a fortnight, I think they will be surprised to get a supper at all," Perry said. "But here is the cruet-stand. Now, Polly, for your salad."

"It's a long process, so meantime I'll amuse the company with a story." Polly began—"Once upon a time there was an artist, and that artist was a woman, and putting the two things together, you'll hardly need to be told that she got more kicks than halfpence. Well, to cut a long story short, the kicks came like hailstones, and the halfpence didn't come at all, and the artist's heart"—here Polly grew warm, and she misplaced her H's recklessly—"was heavy within her. Ladies and gentlemen, I am not ashamed to confess that it is my own story I am telling, and that the friend who sent the duns from my door and set me on my legs again, is here among us."

Here Polly clapped Dr Norman on the back, and added—

"Nay, never be ashamed of having done a kind action, Doctor! When you sent little Laura with twenty pounds to me in my hour of need, I could have cried."

Polly's tears and laughter always kept close company, and, as she said this, a real honest tear glistened in her eye. A murmur of applause ran through the little party; then all looked grave, as befitted the occasion. Monsieur Puig, who was the pink of politeness, wiped away an invisible tear, and nudged his wife to do the same. Laura's cheeks glowed with pleasure at the homage her father was receiving, and she clasped his hand for

a moment lovingly. Dr Norman looked supremely uncomfortable.

"Why, we all look as glum as Quakers saying grace," Mrs Cornford added; "but I hope we shall be as merry as grigs by and by; and if Perry proposes Dr Norman's health, I'll second the motion."

"And I shall drink a *boom-pair*," said Monsieur Puig.

"He means a bumper, I suppose," Mrs Cornford said, bluntly; "but Piggy's English ist not everything that could be wished."

Then the business of the supper began; and it lasted so long that Dr Norman was obliged to make his apologies and go in the midst.

"You should have brought Prissy, sir," Perry said. "She has not yet paid us a visit."

"I don't think it would have been well to bring Prissy this evening. What do you say, Laura?" asked Dr Norman.

"Oh no, papa," poor Laura answered, finding a much more vexatious purport in her father's words than was really intended, "I will fetch her for a long day when we are quite by ourselves."

Then Dr Norman went away. He hardly knew whether to laugh or weep over the experiences of the evening. There was evidently no harm in these guests of Perry's; and some of them, Mrs Cornford and Vittoria, for instance, he heartily liked. Vittoria's manner was perfectly unobjectionable,

gentle, modest, feminine. But with all Mrs Cornford's good qualities, he confessed that her free and easy behaviour was inexpressibly distasteful to him. He could not support the idea of his little Laura catching her tone in ever so slight a degree; and how impossible it is not to catch the tone of one's intimate friends! Who can say, moreover, where bad manners end, and bad morals begin? He determined to have a long and earnest talk with Perry on the subject. Perry was so sweet-tempered, so pliable, and so utterly devoid of anything like self-assertion, that he could but be hopeful as to the result.

CHAPTER LXIX.

PERRY UNDER DOMESTICATION.

It is needless to say that Laura was supremely happy. At first the habits of her lord and master were somewhat disconcerting to her orderly notions. For instance, he would often lie in bed till eleven o'clock, and after a hasty breakfast in dressing-gown and slippers, rush off to his studio at Fulham, expecting dinner at any moment he might happen to return. Or, if he stayed at home, he would paint, promiscuously attired, in her little drawing-room, till what with paint-brushes, painting rags, and other artistic paraphernalia, it became so littered

as to require an entire cleaning. It must be admitted that Mr Perugino stayed at home a great deal. He delighted in his home; he delighted in the society of his young wife; he delighted to teach her music and painting, or any other accomplishment of which he was master. He delighted, too, in the business of house-keeping. There was hardly a branch of this department, from ordering the dinner to cleaning the plate, that Mr Perugino did not thoroughly understand. One day he would astonish the proper-minded middle-aged cook Dr Norman had provided for them, by blacking the boots of the little household, offering to include her own, with the remark—

“Now, Jemima, if ever, is the time to take a walk with the object of your affections, for I was born a shoeblack, and understand my business.”

Dr Norman sent his son-in-law the present of a small cask of sherry, and over the bottling of it he was as happy as a child over a new toy. Of course, Polly must have a bottle, and Petroffsky a bottle, and Piggy two bottles, and everybody else of his acquaintance a bottle, so that the sherry was finished in no time. But it was with regard to his manner of spending Sundays that Mr Perugino received a series of curtain lectures. Laura's ideas of Sunday were orthodox—morning service, punctual lunch, and cold dinner; every sign of work put aside, and the indulgence only of quiet amusements.

But Perry was very untractable on this head. Again and again he would promise to accompany Laura to church the very next Sunday; but Sunday after Sunday came, and just as the last bell was tolling, Mr Perugino would put his head out of his little dressing-room, and make excuse. Laura invariably had to go alone. Jemima was a Methodist, moreover; and by way, as Perry said, of giving her a more liberal turn of mind, he would play lively tunes on his guitar, or offer to take her portrait, which, as Jemima said, made her shudder to think of—"yet it was impossible to be angry with the master."

Such was Perry's conduct under the process of domestication, as naturalists say. No wild young elephant caught in the corrals of Ceylon could show a greater dislike to being tamed than he, and he flew to his old studio as a refuge, and to his old friend for sympathy.

"If I haven't a spur in my side," he said in these days to Polly Cornford, "I 've a bit in my mouth, and no mistake about it. I 've heard of mothers-in-law"—here he made a grimace of dismay—"but I 'll be hanged if fathers-in-law are not ten times worse."

"You are a lucky dog to have Dr Norman for yours," answered Polly.

"Oh yes"—here Perry made another wry face—"but he leads me a terrible life of it, I assure you. I daren't say my soul is my own."

"What does that matter? The clothes on your back are, which is much more important."

"I can see well enough what the doctor is driving at. He wants me to stick to work, and save my money, and become a respectable member of society", Perry said, indignantly; "but I won't be driven to anything—I tell you I won't be driven, Polly!" He added, in a doleful voice—"I 've no longer a spark of ambition in me. When a man loses—you understand what I would say, Polly. Laura and I are as happy as can be, but a little dull sometimes. I 'm an ungrateful wretch to say so, but such is the truth. If I could only forget that a woman had never lived of whom one could say, 'Time cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety.'"

"Oh yes, I know what to expect of you," Polly said, bitterly. "Laura is an angel, and Kitty was the opposite. Because you are happy, you think how much pleasanter it would have been to be scolded, and sermonised, and quarrelled with, and looked down upon; whereas little Laura worships the very ground you tread upon—the more fool she!"

Perry never got much condolence from Polly Cornford, you may be sure. His prosperity was the crowning satisfaction of her life, and she talked of it by day, and dreamed of it by night. She wrote to Kitty about it—perhaps the only little

bit of malice Polly had ever indulged in; but as she said to Vittoria—

“A woman can no more help being spiteful, if injured by another, than a man can help using his fists if affronted by a blackguard.”

Perry had, indeed, a bit in his mouth, though it was held by a light and careful hand. Dr Norman managed his son-in law with great skill. In a spirit half of playfulness, half of gentle resistance, he had contrived to make his way into the young man's confidence; and once that victory achieved, the rest was easy. Perry's superficial vagabondage he let alone. If he preferred to breakfast at noon, and go unkempt in his shirt-sleeves for the rest of the day, what did it matter to him? If he liked Artemus Ward and French novels better than any other literature, that was equally Mr Perugino's own affair. But since Perry had married a young wife, it was surely his duty to bestir himself a little, and go about the business of life in a manly spirit. Dr Norman set a hundred little traps of the kind Perry was too blind to see. For instance, he would send him the following note—

“DEAR PERUGINO,—Will you bring Laura to dine with me to-morrow at seven o'clock? So-and-so” (naming the very person Perry had expressed a desire to meet) “is coming, &c., &c.; all of them worth your while to know. Yours truly. E. N.

“P. S.—I will send my fly-man for you exactly at a quarter to seven, and he shall bring you back.”

Of course Perry would take Laura; and the consequences were, that the young artist made plenty of influential friends, and saw himself fairly on the road to fortune. At the house of his father-in-law he met art lovers, who looked upon a new genius as so much treasure-trove; art critics, artists, and cultivated men and women of the world, who took kindly to Perry, as was only natural. When Polly Cornford heard of the invitations sent to Perry and Laura from houses of the best standing, her eyes beamed with pleasure. She was content to paint clever, ill-paid pictures in her lonely little studio all her life, so long as Perry flourished like a bay-tree. Poor old Petroffsky, whose memory no more retained what was said to him than a sieve retains water, used to nod at Polly's good news, and smile, and try to hit the right nail on the head, by saying—

“There is nobody like Kitty Silvere—*j'ai dit cela toujours, mon amie.*”

He thought Perry had married Kitty all the time! Perry, therefore, prospered against his will. When his picture was hung on the line at the Academy, and obtained flattering notices in the newspapers, and he was pointed out as the next A. R. A. to be elected, and fortune smiled upon him, do you

suppose he was as grateful as it behoved him to be? Do you suppose in his secret heart he called himself a lucky fellow? O stern moralists! look into your own hearts and forgive! Which of us does not think he could improve upon Providence now and then? We are like big children at a lottery, and would fain change our prizes, were they the very ones we have coveted. Perry was sure to enjoy life very much. With his loving, gifted nature, anything like moroseness was impossible. He merely felt a little dull sometimes, as he had said to Polly Cornford—

“Ah! what days those were when we all lived together, without a care and without a sixpence,” was the sentiment this ungrateful young cynic would utter. “A bottle of champagne was a bottle of champagne then.”

“Which wasn’t often,” Polly answered.

“And a song was a song when I was a young harum-scarum,” Perry added. “I’m a proper sort of person now. I’ve no debts. My position improves every day; but on my soul, Polly, I couldn’t sing to a merry tune if it were to save my life.”

But it must be said on Perry’s behalf, that he did not fall into a moralising mood very often. Laura thought herself the happiest person in God’s beautiful world. Whether Perry were idle or industrious, sad or merry, devoted to her happiness or addicted to solitude—for Mr Perugino had

alternate fits of asceticism and sociability—were all one. He was her husband, her joy, her darling. She wondered whether other women loved their husbands as much as she did, and whether such love made them as happy. On the whole, then, Dr Norman had reason to be thankful. Laura loved Perry too fondly to take his shortcomings to heart; and, so long as Perry was under his eye, they could not take much harm. Of course the young couple got into difficulties now and then, for Perry adhered to the maxim dear to Bohemia—"Take no thought for the morrow." They would occasionally wake up to find themselves without money. Perry would shock Laura by buying some rare old oak cabinet with the money she had been saving up for the quarter's butcher's and baker's bills. Or they would determine upon the most rigid economy in eating and drinking, in order to buy a bit of tapestry Perry had taken a fancy to, till both fell ill from sheer want of proper food. Amongst Dr Norman's boys Perry reigned supreme; and Prissy liked him sincerely. But Prissy had only one hero, who was her father. She clung to him more and more as time wore on, and gloried in his distinction as Laura gloried in Perry's. What Dr Norman's life would have been without the love of his little daughter he dared not think; and it seemed to brighten the future, as a distant ray of sunlight brightens some far-off field.

CHAPTER LXX.

THE RETURN HOME.

THE Bartelottes returned to England in May; and Sir George and Kitty went straight to Akenholme Park, till the house in Clarges Street should be got into order. Ella stayed with friends in London. Kitty had never been into the Eastern counties before, and found it dreary. There was the departure from Shoreditch Station to begin with. What can be more conducive to a suicidal state of mind than the long, tortuous winding of the train over the squalid, smoky districts of Stepney and Stratford? No sunshine brightens, no breeze penetrates those dusky regions of London, which look more fit for the habitation of Cyclops and ghouls than of civilised men and women. When at last the train was speeding amid bright green fields and trim villages, they left off regretting foreign lands, and grew cheerful. Kitty was dying to see Akenholme Park, and to take her place as mistress of it. She felt sure she would be happy there.

"We shall have to rough it a little till we get back to London," Sir George said. "I told Dawson not to hire more than one or two servants, as our plans are so uncertain."

"You and I are fortunately not so fastidious as dear Ella," Kitty answered, smiling.

Akenholme Park was a pretty place enough, as far as natural advantages went, possessing soft green slopes, and noble oaks, and a garden capable of development into something really enticing. The house was well-built and comfortable. There were a few good pictures on the walls, a little choice old furniture, collections of china, coins, and the usual heirlooms of a house, if not ancient or splendid, at least of respectable age, and moderate wealth. The great treasure of Akenholme Park was one which Kitty could appreciate very little, namely, a small but choice library of rare old books. What troubled Kitty was the shabbiness of the place. The carpets were threadbare, the colours of the curtains faded past recognition, the papers on the walls discoloured with age. The garden was utterly run to waste. The stables were empty. The old family carriage dilapidated past mending. She tried to coax Sir George into a little lavishness, by all womanly, wifely arts.

"Dearest," she would say, making him look at this or that piece of faded upholstery, "you shall have no rest till you let me go to Ipswich and order the new furniture for the drawing-room."

Whereupon Sir George would only shake his head and chuckle at Kitty's supreme naïveté and overweening ambition. As if the furniture that had been good enough for Ella was not good enough for a young lady brought up in Paradise Place, forsooth! He would merely say—

"We must see what the preparations in London come to first, you know. Do, for the present, leave off bewailing the furniture, and help me with my books."

Poor Kitty had to pay dearly in these days for the interest she had formerly affected to take in old books. Sir George was never tired of re-arranging and re-cataloguing his treasures, and why should not Kitty help him, since she was so conversant with the subject of bibliography, and so fond of it, too! Morning after morning was spent in the monotonous work of writing, from Sir George's dictation, the names and dates of musty old Plutarchs and Horaces, and Facciolatis and Chaucers, and making lists of Aldine editions, and other editions, in which she took not the slightest interest. If she grew pale and weary, Sir George had the shabby little pony-carriage put to, and would drive her to see his farms, or to the nearest post-town to get his letters.

"We won't call upon any one till we return from London," he had said; and as they effectually hid themselves from observation, Lady Bartelotte received no visits. Sometimes she went into the village to play the Lady Bountiful; but how much more difficult it was to be the Lady Bountiful of Akenholme Park than of Shelley House! In Dr Norman's house a store of wine and meat was always at hand for the sick or aged poor; in Sir George's there never seemed anything to give away. Dawson, the housekeeper — by no means the traditional

housekeeper in black silk and widow's cap Kitty had expected—but a homely old soul, who had been chosen by Sir George for her thrift and pliability of disposition, used to answer her mistress's questions thus—

“Lors! my lady, there's no sort o' use in yer ladyship listening to them folks. They'll make a lady like you believe a sucking-pig is a red herrin', with their artfull talk. Sir George gives away coals and meat to the good church-goers at Christmas, and a sovereign to all the lying-in women on his estates, and five shillings extra to them as have boys; and what more would they have? There's no gratitude in poor folks, as yer ladyship will soon find out.”

Kitty proposed to Sir George that she should take an interest in the Sunday-school; but he cautioned her against pledging herself to anything very serious.

“It is all very well to hold with the clergyman of your parish, and attend church, and that sort of thing. I'm a good Conservative, and I would do as much for Church and State as anybody. But, my dear, you don't know what it is to be hand and glove with a country rector. First he wants money for repairing the church, then for the schools, then for a new organ, then for the choir, till what with one thing and another, your hand is always in your pocket.”

So Kitty was compelled to receive the friendly

invitations of the rector's family with polite frigidity; and to give up the idea of reigning supreme in the parish.

"We shall see a little of our neighbours in the autumn, I suppose?" she said to her husband one day.

"My dear, I don't think you would care for our neighbours. We shall interchange calls and personal visits, of course; but they are richer than we, and it is better not to get too intimate. We must be economical, and think of what need of economy the future—under God's blessing—may bring."

Kitty wondered, how she should continue to spend the days at Akenholme Park without Ella; for Ella had bound herself over to share Mr Tyrrell's home one day. There was a piano, there was a flower-garden, there was a pony-carriage; but little else upon which she could count for amusement. Without the prospect of occasional visits to London and Ella, her future looked dull enough. For in spite of all that had threatened to estrange them, and had, in truth, marred the first sweetness of their friendship, Kitty clung to Ella as of old. What the lives of some women would be without the friendship of other women, is only known to God and themselves. Kitty was fain to make much of the only friend left to her of so many! Matters mended as soon as they reached London. The house in Clarges Street had been repaired and embellished. Ella had engaged

a respectable staff of servants; a pretty open carriage was indulged in; and the household arrangements were put on a comfortable footing. To Sir George's intense satisfaction in the prospect of Ella's wealthy marriage—Mr Tyrrell was, moreover, heir to a baronetcy—much of this liberality was owing. He loved Ella as dearly as ever, but his own marriage had altered the course of things, and naturally he wanted to have Kitty as much as possible to himself. For Kitty seemed to him to grow more bewitching every day. Kitty's dreams, therefore, had come true at last—the dreams of wealth, of elegance, of refinement. She was presented at Court; she was invited to sumptuous houses; she drove in the parks, as she had longed to do in the days of her scheming, sulky, and yet how well-beloved girlhood! It was very pleasant; and she would have liked the season to last all the year round. The late hours, the dazzling lights, the round of formal calls, never wearied her, as they soon wearied Ella. She attended morning concerts, and as she leaned back in her velvet chair on the first row, recalled the old days with a smile. Then she used to sit with Perry in the orchestra, and he amused himself during the intervals by cracking nuts for her, or drawing caricatures of the performers on his programme. Ambition was silent within her for a while, and she only cared to enjoy. These bland, soft-minded ladies and gentlemen she met night after night, did

not frighten her, as she had expected they would do. There was no occasion to shine or seem clever. It sufficed to look agreeable, and do nothing. One evening Kitty and Sir George attended a brilliant soirée at the South Kensington Museum. The place was crowded to the last inch with well-dressed people, who trod on each other's toes, jostled each other, and elbowed each other with graceful apology. There was a band of good music, and a refreshment-room, to which Sir George, who always liked refreshments, took Kitty. Whilst sipping their tea, a tall, dark-browed, much-bearded man, entered, with a fair-haired, round-cheeked, languid-looking lady on his arm. Kitty did not know that Myra and Captain Longley were again in England, and started. Before she had time to whisper their names in her husband's ear, they approached, and were in the act of sitting down, when Myra recognised her friend. Kitty, without thinking, smiled, and was about to advance; but Myra turned away, and Captain Longley followed. It was evidently intended for a dead cut! Kitty coloured a little.

"I had forgotten how angry I made Myra two years ago," she said. "She must do as she pleases about forgiving me."

"Confound their impertinence!" said Sir George. "The idea of Mrs Longley cutting you is preposterous; but she never quite knew what etiquette was;

and camp life in India has not taught her, it seems."

Myra had treated the matter much more seriously, and was quite pale with excitement.

"I hoped I might never, never see her again," she said to her husband. "No one knows how I loved her, and how she deceived me."

"And I have little cause to be grateful to Miss Silver—I beg her pardon—Lady Bartelotte," Captain Longley rejoined. "She did me an ill turn when I first paid court to you."

"Was she well dressed? Did she look happy?" asked Myra.

"I really never noticed her dress or her looks; but they are still there, and I will take a survey on the sly." So saying the captain put up his glass and eyed the pair. "Yes, I should say she is well dressed."

"Do they appear pleased with each other's company?"

Again Captain Longley took a survey.

"I should say," he said, slowly, "that she is a little bored; and no wonder, for I always looked upon Sir George as the most consummate little prig on the face of the earth."

Kitty appeared to treat the matter lightly, but she did not forget it. Why could not Myra let bygones be bygones? Had she no recollection of human devotion? If the one had been lavish in worldly things, the other had been profuse in gifts

of a rarer kind. They might surely cry quits now and be friends. Myra's conduct disconcerted her. It was vulgar on grounds of etiquette, and high-flown as a matter of sentiment. Kitty, in homely phrase, wanted to have her cake and eat it; to use her friends as best suited her, and retain their friendship. But friendship is a garden of flowers, to be cultivated with tenderest love and care; not a plot of common ground, to be dealt with according to its marketable value. So, in time, Kitty found out.

CHAPTER LXXI.

MORE OLD FRIENDS.

It was now July and summer in earnest. The sun had scorched all the colour out of the parks. The trees in the squares looked brown as in autumn. The red-hot faces of the omnibus drivers blazed from Camberwell Gate to Hammersmith Broadway, as watchfires of old from Ida to the Arachnaean hills when Troy was taken. Yet the rich and pleasure-loving stayed on; and Kitty, for whom awaited the cool glades and over-arching bowers of Akenholme Park, dreaded the very word "departure" as a sentence.

Sir George used to say to her again and again, not imagining that his Elysium could be her Hades—

"My dear child, when Ella runs away from us we can winter at Akenholme. Only think of the comfortable, undisturbed life it will be; and I really see no reason why we should not let the London house for a time."

Poor Kitty! She determined to shut out this idea of the comfortable, undisturbed winters at Akenholme Park, and enjoy the present whilst it lasted. She hardly dared to speak to Ella on the subject of her marriage, so greatly did she dread what she knew would follow. One day Ella happened to say—

"Mr Tyrrell wants me to marry him this autumn, and proposes to take me to Egypt for my wedding trip."

"And have you consented?" asked Kitty, almost breathlessly.

"Oh no," Ella answered, laughing. "He must have a little patience. There is time enough."

"How dreary it will be when you are gone—how dreary!" Kitty said, sighing.

"I hope not, dear Kitty. You must rouse papa, and make him see how necessary a little change is for you. Why should you not take the Nile journey with us—or, at any rate, part of it?"

But Kitty knew in her secret heart that she could not rouse Sir George. If she roused him at all it must be by sheer force of will and temper; and to exercise will and temper now would be changing herself from an angel into a virago.

Sir George doated on the angel, but he ruled her with a rod of iron; he would hate the virago, but she knew that he would fear and obey her. Any happy medium did not exist; her simple Yea and Nay could never carry weight as Ella's did, because she had hitherto taught Sir George that his will was hers. She could not turn round and play the shrew whilst the singing of the siren was fresh in his ears. Goethe has said, "Der Augenblick ist Ewigkeit!"—"The present moment is eternity." And Kitty's present satisfied her as if indeed it were to last for ever. The most trifling accessories of every-day existence delighted her. The most trifling dignities of her new position filled her with childish enjoyment.

Just before the London season came to an end, Lady Adela gave a magnificent reception. Kitty moved from room to room, lost in admiration of the brilliant lights, the costly flowers, the stars and orders, the diamonds, the satins, the lace.

Amongst the crowd of Lady Adela's guests, numbering a foreign prince or two, ambassadors, peers and peeresses, bishops, statesmen, and generals, Kitty and Sir George were not naturally of much account. A man who spends his best years abroad simply for his own good-will and pleasure, and then presents himself in England, has no right to feel disappointed if he stands at a disadvantage. What has he done for society that society should do him homage? Again, if he brings home a

young wife, of whom the world knows nothing, what right has he to take offence at her apparent insignificance? In Lady Adela's world, Lady Bartelotte was supremely insignificant, and the truth dawned upon Kitty when the first flush of her enjoyment was over. She knew a few people, and had been introduced to some strangers, but there anything like sharing in the universal sociality was at an end. Ella never attended late parties, or matters would have been better. Looking on the gay scene by her husband's side, Kitty felt almost as much out of place as if she had been transported thither fresh from the poverty and inexperience of Paradise Place years ago. A few minutes before she had wished that Mrs Cornford and Vittoria could see her moving amid these splendid crowds, "with all her bravery on," but now the child-like wish was recalled.

"I suppose we shall be going soon?" she said to Sir George—"it is already late."

"As you please—exactly as you please, my dear. Oh! here is Tyrrell. Let us hear what he has to say."

"Are not these rooms superb?" asked Mr Tyrrell of Kitty, after a little talk. "They have been re-decorated since Lady Adela was last in England. Her taste is faultless."

Then he drew Kitty's attention to some exquisite wall-painting, and the general harmony of colour displayed throughout the room.

"By the by," he said, after a time, "I have just seen an old friend of yours, Lady Bartelotte. I got Lady Adela to introduce me—no easy matter, I assure you. He happens to be the one person everybody wants to know, and is certainly most delightful. I mean Dr Norman."

"Dr Norman here?" Kitty asked, greatly astonished.

"You may well look astonished, for he is almost a hermit; but Lady Adela persuades people against their wills. He is just talking with Lord—, one of the most enthusiastic admirers of Dr Norman's scientific speculations."

"Suppose we go and look for him?" Sir George said, tickled at the idea of encountering his old antagonist and rival. "What do you say, Kitty?"

"Just as you please, dear," Kitty said; and they went.

"You never mentioned to us," Mr Tyrrell went on, "that Dr Norman's daughter was married to Perugino Neeve, the young artist whose pictures have been so talked of lately—and such a pretty daughter, too!"

Kitty was getting more and more out of her depth. She said, with quite a bewildered look, "They, too, here?" feeling as much surprised as if Mrs Cornford's presence had been announced.

"Lady Adela adores genius, you know, and there is very little doubt of Mr Neeve being a genius."

Then Mr Tyrrell went on to say how Perry had been introduced to So-and-So, and So-and-So, and how he and his young wife were said to be the handsomest people in the room—with a few exceptions, he put in parenthetically, adding—

“It must be very pleasant to have genius. Like a golden key, it unlocks all the treasure-stores of the world. I have heard”—here he dropped his voice—“that this very Perugino Neeve, whom Lady Adela’s guests are praising and lionising, used to live in an attic among a company of the veriest Bohemians [that ever were. But there’s Dr. Norman! He is still in the heat of his discussion, so we will just pass on.”

They approached slowly, and Kitty had time to look well at her old friend and faithful lover. He appeared younger, rather than older, to her thinking, the natural effect of a more elaborate toilette and better-trimmed beard; for Dr Norman, like all frail mortals, owed a good deal to outward adornment; and his expression was animated, eager, almost joyous, as he debated on some favourite topic. Without being at all a striking-looking or handsome man, Dr Norman could bear comparison with the more physically favoured of his fellows. His presence was simple and yet full of dignity, his brow noble, his smile sweet, his voice clear and musical. As they went by, he looked up, and recognising Kitty in all her dignity of pink satin and diamonds, bowed coldly and let her

pass. There was not a vestige of a smile on his lips, not a shade of friendliness in the look with which he greeted her, not a sign of anything like the recognition Kitty had expected from him. It is easy to convey irrevocable meanings with a glance of the eyes, a smile, or a hand-clasp, and she had always hoped for a token of perfect forgiveness at Dr Norman's hands, whenever they might chance to meet. What so natural for him now as to have stepped forward and said a friendly word? Kitty, who had always given her friends stones when they had asked for bread, could not understand, could not pardon them for doing the same. Dr Norman's conduct was hard, cruel, unjustifiable, she said to herself, and it was with much ado she could keep the angry tears from rising to her eyes. Why were men so hard upon women? If she had wronged him, had she not atoned for her wrong long ago by keen self-reproach? Poor Kitty! As if passive self-reproach of itself can atone for wrong! She felt, moreover, a little natural mortification at the conviction of her husband's insignificance. Even Perry, poor, despised, neglected, absurd Perry, had made a better figure at this noble lady's house than he! What was Sir George Bartelotte to society, that it should trouble itself to smile upon him? And as Sir George Bartelotte's wife, she must, of course, share his insignificance. She wished and intended from her heart of hearts to be true and good and

loyal to him, who had chosen her for his wife. This, if anything, must be her salvation in the future.

"How did you enjoy the party, my love?" asked Sir George, after settling himself comfortably in a corner of the carriage.

"It was magnificent!" Kitty said.

"What an odd coincidence that we should meet Dr Norman at Lady Adela's, above all places! He's a gentlemanly fellow, though surly as a bear—and I've nothing to say against Lady Adela's receiving him. But what was Tyrrell telling you about your old protégé—the painter?"

"He is married to Dr Norman's daughter, and they were both there," Kitty answered, calmly.

"The deuce he was! But I thought you described him as a sort of Bohemian, one of those delectable persons one meets with in Balzac's or Murger's novels?"

"He was very poor once, and the society he lived in called itself Bohemian."

"Then all that I can say is, that English society is getting so damnably democratic (excuse me, my dear), that I think we had better give it up altogether, and go abroad again. How thankful you must be that you married me, and washed your hands clean of your old friends—eh, Kitty?"

"But it does not seem as if my old friends were anything to be ashamed of," Kitty said, laughing

a little bitterly. "They received twice as much homage as you or I did."

"Pshaw!" said Sir George. "Lady Adela is a lion-hunter. That is all. She would invite the King of the Cannibal Islands if he came to London. Take my advice, my dear Kitty, and look upon yourself as a lucky woman to have married a respectable man instead of any of your high-flying geniuses."

And thereupon the worthy baronet began to doze and by the time the carriage stopped in Clarges Street, was sound asleep. Ella had gone to bed long ago, but little Françoise was waiting to undress her mistress.

"Mon Dieu! que Miladi est belle ce soir!" she said again and again, as she took off the pink satin dress and the diamonds, and unbraided Kitty's long dark hair.

But Kitty smiled no response upon the little thing as she had done many and many a time before.

"What does it matter? Qu'est que cela fait!" she said, impatiently, and that was all. She was bewildered by the events of the evening. The splendour of the scene, the sense of her own and her husband's insignificance—nay, isolation—the chance meeting with Dr Norman, the fact of Perry's presence; all these things perplexed her as painfully as mathematical problems perplex a student in the deliriums of fever.

And Dr Norman's look—so stern, so steadfast—so retributive—haunted her as she lay wakeful on her soft pillows.

CHAPTER LXXII.

KITTY'S LAST APPEARANCE IN BOHEMIA.

At last the London season came to an end. Mr Tyrrell had overruled Ella's objections to a speedy marriage; so that all prospect of a winter abroad was over, and Kitty was making preparations for a long stay at Akenholme Park. Three months were to intervene before the marriage took place; after which, Mr Tyrrell proposed that they should carry out his first plan of a Nile journey. To this, also, Ella had consented. She was so much stronger now than of old, and had ever longed to see the Pyramids. She saw, moreover, how utterly impossible it was for her to interfere successfully on behalf of Kitty. Once she had attempted to convince Sir George that Kitty would find Akenholme a dreary home in winter, and he had said—

"My darling, a woman must live where her husband likes. It is surely a little late for Kitty to come to the conclusion that my house is a dull one."

And then he went straight to Kitty, and asked

her angrily if she had wished Ella to be a go-between, and if indeed she was so unreasonable as to have fancies about this or that place being dull. Because, if so, he added, the sooner she got accustomed to the dullness the better. It was a pleasant prospect for a man, forsooth! if such a home as Akenholme Park could not satisfy his wife a few months after marriage, etcetera, etcetera. Kitty listened, meek as a lamb; and confessed, with penitent tears and insinuating words, that the thought of losing Ella had made her dread a winter at Akenholme. But Sir George was not easily pacified. She had to cry *Peccavi! Peccavi!* a hundred times, to cover her head with dust and ashes, to crave for pardon in humbled tones before he forgave her. Then, condescending to bestow a kiss upon her pale, tear-wet cheek, he went away, and punished her—as he thought—by being a little cold, a little dictatorial, and extremely exacting for a day or two. Ella, seeing how matters stood, wisely held her peace for the future, and Kitty banished the word “dull” from her vocabulary. Sir George congratulated himself upon the way in which he was training his young high-spirited wife. He had always resolved upon being an angel of goodness to her, but on the condition of her unquestioning obedience only. When that was withheld, he considered any amount of harshness justifiable, and indeed expedient. Marriage had not improved the baronet’s character;

and it had marred the one admirable trait in it—namely, his unselfish love for Ella. Between him and his child, as was certainly natural, just a shade of mistrust, just the merest suspicion of coldness, had grown up since the day on which Ella discerned that he and Kitty were secretly leagued against her. But Ella loved her father too dearly to be quite happy whilst such unhappy feelings lasted, and it was this reason that had induced her to favour Mr Tyrrell's plan. She thought a temporary separation would surely set matters straight; and would also put her relationship with Kitty on a safer footing.

The journey into Suffolk was determined upon early in August. There was a great deal of shopping to do meanwhile on Ella's account; and Kitty, who loved to be busy, was driving about all day long. It happened on the last day before departure, that she had to transact some business with a certain seedsman and florist at Fulham. Sir George was fond of arboriculture, and had deputed her to procure some seeds of the *Eucalyptus Globulus*, an Australian tree, which was just then much discussed in the newspapers. Chance therefore led Kitty into the well-known haunts of her girlhood. She passed the little so-called Brompton lanes, through which she and Perry had strolled—ah! how many a Sunday evening! talking lovers' talk, laughing, sporting, like the happy vagabonds they were! She passed the West Brompton Cemetery, where Perry's father lay buried—

thanks to Polly Cornford's goodness—and other friends of Bohemia, whose bones, but for Polly, would have been “only a pauper's, nobody owns!” And she thought of her own grave—Lady Bartelotte's—in the family vault at Akenholme Church. How stately, how far away from those of her early friends and lovers it would be! Life seemed so strange, could death be stranger? Then she came to those lonely old granges, so ghostly, so deserted, so weird, that still stand amid tangled gardens, and give this part of London the picturesque, old-world look it wears. She had often come here with Perry on a painting expedition, and remembered every feature of the landscape so well. Here was a pariah apple-tree he had pillaged for her. There was a bench on which they sat to eat the contents of his wallet. A little farther on was an inn, where they were picked up when rain came on by a town-traveller, who obligingly gave them a ride home. Kitty for the nonce lost sight of the discomfort of that early time, and recollected only how loving and merry and free-hearted it had been. And how true! Then, indeed, out of the fulness of the heart had the mouth ever spoken!

Amid these retrospections she had longings—not immortal, like Cleopatra's,—but longings that were human, wistful, childishly loving! She felt as if she must see an old familiar face, and hear an old familiar voice once more. She had, as it were,

parted with her youth in a sullen, vindictive mood; but now she repented of her sullenness, and wished to say a late but tender adieu. Why should she not go to Paradise Place? The servants were to be dismissed next day; and, even in any case, how could a visit to Polly Cornford scandalise her? She should not tell Sir George; but if Sir George discovered it, he could hardly be angry. There was, surely, no more harm in stopping at Paradise Place than at the seedsman's, who lived within a stone's throw? If the neighbourhood were a disreputable one, Sir George should not have sent her thither. She gave the order; and, to the intense amazement of the little colony, an open carriage and pair stopped at Polly Cornford's door.

"Ask if Mrs Cornford is within," she said to the man; "if not, leave this."

So saying, she slipped a ten-pound note into an envelope, scribbled inside—"For Papa Peter, from K. B." and put it in the man's hand.

But Mrs Cornford was within. Kitty descended, and followed the little maid-of-all-work in-doors.

"Put on a clean apron, Mary Hann, and say, 'Please will your ladyship take a seat,'" Polly had said on recognising her visitor from a front window. Then she proceeded hastily to array herself in her best cap, and threw a silk shawl over her shoulders by way of showing Kitty respect, and further impressing the mind of pert Mary Hann.

Kitty waited in the dingy little sitting-room. How

familiar it looked—how unchanged! There was the little bookcase with its greasy Byrons and Shakespeares, and Waverleys and Sues, from which Perry had read aloud many and many a winter's evening. She remembered that the very arm-chair on which she sat had been mended by Perry again and again. And the table before her—as if in a vision—became surrounded with old friendly faces. And the little garden behind seemed on a sudden alive with old familiar voices. Were Perry and the children really watering the borders of nasturtium and mignonette, or was she dreaming?

“How d'ye do, Lady Bartelotte?” said Polly, holding out her hand with as much formality as she was capable of. “I hope I see you well.”

But Kitty put her arms about her old friend, and kissed her cordially, and reiterated—

“I am so glad to see you again, Polly—so glad!”

“I'll take you at your word for once,” Polly said, smiling; and forgetting the resolutions she had just made not to shock Lady Bartelotte with undue familiarities, she stroked her lace mantle, and viewed her silk dress, and costly little parasol admiringly.

“My! my dear,” she cried, with childish admiration; “do you wear such beautiful clothes every day?”

Kitty made some vague sort of response, then said—

“Tell me of yourself, dear Polly. Are you

prosperous? And the children and Papa Peter, are they well?"

"Oh! as for myself," Polly answered, "I've my ups and downs—six of one and half-a-dozen of t'other, pretty regularly, and that's what I take most people's lives to be. You're one of the lucky ones, and know most about the ups."

But Kitty was determined not to talk of herself.

"And the chicks, and Papa Peter?" she repeated.

"Oh! the chicks are in the country. They're a sad lot, but the house is dull without 'em now. I 'prenticed Mimi to Emilia Bianchi to learn photography, and she ran away! Old Petroffsky is very well—you must see him before you go. I suppose you've been leading a gay life of it lately?"

"We are going to be very quiet now in the country," Kitty said drawing lines on the carpet with her little lace-bordered parasol.

"Oh dear! it does seem odd that things are as they are," Polly said, striving to be gay. "I'm as puzzled as a rat who has lost his tail. It's just four years ago, isn't it, this month, since you started off to go to Shelley House? Who would have thought of your coming back Lady Bartelotte?"

"I've been very ungrateful to you all along, Polly," Kitty said, looking on the ground; "but I know you forgive me."

"Twiddle-dum-dee!" cried Polly; and seeing

Kitty still look grave, added—"Hoity-toity-tum! Don't moralise, my dear."

Kitty did not seem to hear, and continued in the same voice—

"I often wonder at myself for having behaved to you as I have done; and yet I know if I came to you years hence, a beggar and in rags, you would take me in."

"Pray don't talk in that proper sort of strain, Kitty. It makes me feel quite bad to hear you. Let bygones be bygones, I say; if I were riled with you once for Perry's sake, it couldn't last for ever. Let's go up-stairs and see Petroffsky, by way of enlivening us a bit."

Kitty followed Polly up the narrow little staircase, Mary Hann watching her aghast with surprise.

"He's always prating about his beautiful Katherine, poor old soul!" Polly said; then, heightening her voice, added—"Here's Lady Bartelotte come to see you, my dear—our Kitty that was, you know."

"Enfin!" the old man said, looking up with the bewilderment of paralysis—"Enfin! welcome, bel enfant!"

He would have kissed her hand, but Kitty, moved by the sight of his age and helplessness, leaned forward and kissed him on the brow. Petroffsky was perhaps the only friend of her childhood whom she had never wronged by a

selfish, unkind act. He wiped his eyes, looked at her again and again, shy, joyful, puzzled.

"Que vous êtes belle!" he said, surveying her from head to foot. "And Monsieur Perugino, is he in good health? Ah! Monsieur Perugino seldom comes to play cribbage with me now!"

"He always persists in thinking Perry is married to you," Polly whispered. "Don't contradict him."

"Et votre chapeau," he said, after a pause, recalling the bonnet he had earned for her years ago, by dint of French lessons. "Votre chapeau? Était-il beau? But that demoiselle had a head of wood. She never achieved the verb *être*—never!"

Kitty smiled, though tears were in her eyes. The bonnet was very pretty, she said. Then he begged Madame Cornford to present his beautiful Katherine with the neck-ribbons that had been the fruits of further lessons to the demoiselle with the head of wood.

"He's been saving these for you all these years," Polly said, in an under-tone. "Say you're pleased."

Of course, Kitty took the neck-ribbons and said she was pleased. The old man wiped his eyes.

"Mais que vous êtes en grand tenue, bel enfant!" he said. "Monsieur Perugino doit être bien riche alors. Ah! why do you come so seldom? Is it because my poor violin is broken, and I can no longer play to you? My fingers have no music in them now," he added, looking down at his poor

helpless hands, and my violin was too polite to survive. Voilà tout!"

"Kitty lives too far off to come often," cried out Polly. "That's why she can't come."

Then she nudged Kitty, who made her adieux as best she could, and they left him.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

CONCLUSION.

"Now for another old friend," Polly said; and before Kitty had time to collect her thoughts, she was standing on the threshold of Perry's studio, face to face with Perry. He came forward and shook hands, saying never a word. Kitty mastered herself by a great effort.

"I did not know that you came here to paint now," she said, quite calmly.

"My new studio will not be finished till the spring. Do sit down."

Then he placed a chair for her, but she said she would rather not sit down, adding—

"I want to look at your new picture."

"My pictures all go home as soon as they are ready," Perry said. "There is only this sketch on the easel."

They stood before the easel and talked a little while. Kitty asked after Laura. Perry asked after her

husband. There were no artificial smiles or words; each reading the other's naked heart too well.

"The studio is not much changed, is it?" he asked. "The last time you were in this room we figured as Antony and Cleopatra. Do you remember? There are the wreaths of paper-roses we wore, hanging about the lamp still."

"I remember it all," she answered, looking at the faded flowers festooned about the gas-lamps.

"What a farce it was!" he said, with a ghastly smile—"I mean, what a tragedy!"

They were alone now, standing side by side, and some inexplicable sympathy, born of memory, of love, of sorrow, and of the ineffable passion of youth, drew them in spirit near to each other. For a moment they clasped hands and looked into each other's tearful eyes. It was as if a wand had touched them, and they were young and fond and free again.

"Tell me," Perry said, with almost inquisitorial eagerness, part savage, part tender, "are you happy?"

"What is happiness?" Kitty answered, with all the cynicism, and more than the bitterness of Pilate.

Perry dropped her hand. The spell was broken. She seemed in those words to have explained the riddle of her own life, and the mystical sorrow of his. What indeed was happiness to her? He felt as if he had seen a black chasm under a flash of lightning, and drew back horrified. What was he,

what was any one to her? She did not know the meaning of happiness; or, if she did, despised alike the idea and the thing itself.

The Kitty of old must be a dream! When Polly returned, they were talking of Perry's proposed trip to Italy and the East in a year or two, and of Kitty's journey to Akenholme Park, with cold, even voices. Kitty, glancing out of the window, saw the carriage waiting for her, and trembled. Was she in a vision?

"Come, Perry," Polly said, "tell Kitty all the news. He's on a fair way to fame and fortune now, Kitty; that last picture of his was a trump card, and no mistake."

And she rattled on by way of covering the embarrassment of the others, till at last Kitty said she must go.

Perry did not offer to see her into her carriage. "Good-bye," he said, on the threshold. "God bless you!"

"Good-bye," she answered. Remembering Dr Norman's stern look, she dared not to add, "Give my love to Laura."

When alone in the passage with Polly Cornford, she brought out her gift for Papa Peter. "You must let me help him. It makes me so happy," she pleaded, adding, with a dreary smile, "I never behaved badly to him, you know."

"Oh! I'll take your ten-pound note, and welcome," Polly said, blithely. "It's good for your

soul to be generous; and Petroffsky and I are not proud."

Kitty kissed Polly; and, as was natural, they both cried a little.

"I wish I had been good to you," Kitty whispered; then she drew down her veil and turned away.

Mary Hann opened the door wide, and dropped a curtsy; the footman helped her in, and all Paradise Place watched the departure of Polly Cornford's magnificent guest in wonder and admiration.

"God bless you, Kitty!" soliloquised Polly, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron. "There's good in the worst of us, in spite of what the parsons say. And I for one am no saint that I should be dirty particular!"

Kitty never again showed herself in Bohemia. Whether she ever wished to do so, or whether she liked best to stay in the world of her own choosing, history does not say. Certain it is that where the fortunes of Lady Bartelotte begin, the story of Kitty Silver ends. A French writer has said, "In the close of the romance is sure to be the germ of another;" and the first may be as strange as the last. *Qui sait?*

and to be generous, and Petrovsky and I are not
 Kitty kissed Polly; and, as was natural, they
 both cried a little. "I wish I had been good to you," Kitty
 said; then she drew down her veil and turned
 away.

Mary Hann opened the door wide, and dropped
 a curtsy; the footman helped her in; and all the
 time, I have watched the departure of Polly Com-
 ford's magnificent guest in wonder and admiration.
 "God bless you, Kitty!" sobbed Polly, wipe-
 ing her eyes with the corner of her apron.

"There's good in the worst of us," in spite of
 what the parsons say. And I for one am
 sure that I should be duty particular!"

Kitty never again showed herself in Bohemia.
 Whether she ever wished to do so, or whether
 she liked best to stay in the world of her own
 choosing, history does not say. Certain it is that
 where the fortunes of Lady Bartolotte begin, the
 story of Kitty Silver ends. A French writer has
 said, "In the close of the romance is sure to be
 the germ of another;" and the first may be as
 strange as the last. Our story had out of
 hand a new chapter, which, however, we
 would not, out of regard to our
 own and our country's taste, venture to
 lay before the public. The end, however,

THE ROOM IN THE DRAGON VOLANT. By LE FANU, author of "Uncle Silas" etc. 1 vol.

ALBERT LUNEL. By the late LORD BROUGHAM. 2 vol.

THE EUSTACE DIAMONDS. By ANTHONY TROLLOPE. 2 vol.

ADAM GRAEME OF MOSSGRAY. By Mrs. OLIPHANT. 2 vol.

A BRIDGE OF GLASS. By F. W. ROBINSON, author of "Grandmother's Money". 2 vol.

"Mr. Robinson's story possesses the first qualification of a good novel, a well-sustained and interesting plot." — *Athenaeum*.

THE LIFE OF W. PENN. By W. HEPWORTH DIXON. A new edition, rewritten. 2 vol.

"One of the most able and interesting volumes which have proceeded from Mr. Dixon's pen." — *Post*.

TO THE BITTER END. By Miss E. BRADDON. 3 vol.

"No living novelist equals Miss Braddon in fecundity and freshness... Comparing 'To the Bitter End', not with 'Robert Ainsleigh', but with almost any of its recent predecessors, we find the same sustained individuality in the characters, the same ingenuity in the working-out of effective situations, and the same scintillations of humour, which have marked Miss Braddon's books, from the first to the last." — *Standard*.

HOW I FOUND LIVINGSTONE. By Mr. H. M. STANLEY. 3 vol.

MIDDLEMARCH. By GEORGE ELIOT. Book 1 — MISS BROOKE.

———— Book 2 — OLD AND YOUNG.

———— Book 3 — WAITING FOR DEATH.

———— Book 4 — THREE LOVE PROBLEMS.

———— Book 5 — THE DEAD HAND.

———— Book 6 — THE WIDOW AND THE WIFE.

———— Book 7 — THE TWO TEMPTATIONS.

IN THE PRESS:

to be published shortly at the rate of 15 gr. = 2 francs per vol.

THIRTY YEARS IN THE HAREM, or Life in Turkey. By Madame KIBRIZLI MEHEMET PASHA. 2 vol.

"The present work, by a lady who is the wife of one of the highest Turkish dignitaries, is quite of exceptional value and interest." — *Morning Post*.

HERMANN AGHA, an Eastern Narrative. By W. GIFFORD PALGRAVE, author of "Travels in Central Arabia" etc. 2 vol.

"Reads like a tale of life, with all its incidents: the young will take to it for its love portions, the older for its descriptions, some in this day for its Arab philosophy." — *Athenaeum*.

"The cardinal merit, however, of the story is, to our thinking, the exquisite simplicity and purity of the love portion. There is a positive fragrance as of newly-mown hay about it, as compared with the artificially perfumed passions which are detailed to us with such gusto by our ordinary novel writers in their endless volumes." — *Observer*.

FAIR TO SEE. By LAURENCE W. M. LOCKHART. 2 vol.

"'Fair to See' is something better than a clever novel. It shows no little artistic power; and as you read it you feel that there is much more in the book than at first you fancied.... The scenes on the moors, in the barracks, and the ball-rooms, are all dashed off by an expert. These are minor merits, but they go far towards assuring the success of a story which marks a decided advance on the author's first novel." — *Pall Mall Gazette*.

THREE TO ONE; or, Some Passages out of the Life of Amicia Lady Sweetapple. By G. W. DASENT, author of "Annals of an Eventful Life".

AT HIS GATES. By Mrs. OLIPHANT. 2 vol.

"In her last novel, Mrs. Oliphant has achieved, we think, an unequivocal success." — *Athenaeum*.

ROBERT FALCONER. By GEORGE MAC DONALD. 2 vol.

LONDON'S HEART. By B. L. FARJEON.

B. L. Farjeon, the author of "Joshua Marvel" and "Blade-o'-Grass" is pronounced by the best authorities to be one of the most promising of all the younger novelists of the day.

FIRST IN THE FIELD. By the author of "Recommended to Mercy".

"We cordially recommend this work for general perusal. The characters are strongly drawn, the incidents well developed and diversified." — *Messenger*.

HORNBY MILLS and other Stories. By HENRY KINGSLEY.

"We have to thank Mr. Kingsley for two volumes of sustained and varied interest." — *Athenaeum*.

THE DOCTOR'S DILEMMA. By HESBA STRETTON.

IN THE SILVER AGE. By HOLME LEE, author of "The Beautiful Miss Barrington" etc.

AGAINST TIME. By ALEXANDER INNES SHAND.

"Mr. Shand has given us a well-devised and well-constructed fiction, written from first to last with trained and sustained strength . . . His characters are not paintings, that stand out of their canvas, but are one and all clever sketches of an educated hand and quick eye. We heartily wish the book the success it deserves." — *Times*.

BEHIND THE VEIL.

"The plot is certainly ingenious, and the mystery which is implied in the title is very well preserved till the right moment has arrived for 'the veil to be lifted.' . . . There is a great deal of merit in the story: the characters are for the most part well drawn, and the dialogue is lively." — *Saturday Review*.

SIX MONTHS HENCE. By the author of "Behind the Veil".

"Six Months Hence" is a story whose interest is effectively maintained from first to last; but its real force and power lie in the fine treatment of the character, of the heroine, Maria Secretan. In all that Maria Secretan is made to say of herself, there is an honesty and consistency which, before the story is a volume read, makes us feel that we have not to do with one of those stalking ghosts of fiction which have neither substance nor speech about them, but with a real tangible presence." — *Times*.

SHOOTING THE RAPIDS. By the author of "Against Time". 2 vol.

"Mr. Shand has justified the promise of his earlier work by another story marked by great ability . . . extremely few novelists of the day are superior to him." — *Athenaeum*.

BROKEN TOYS. By ANNA C. STEELE, author of "Gardenhurst", "So runs the World away". 2 vol.

ASTON ROYAL. By the author of "St. Olave's", "Janita's Cross" etc. 2 vol.

"Aston Royal abounds with many beauties, much clever writing and that thorough insight into human nature which made 'St. Olave's' so universally and deservedly popular." — *Messenger*.

COMING HOME TO ROOST. BY GERALD GRANT.

A PASSION IN TATTERS. BY ANNIE THOMAS. 2 vol.

MARKET HARBOROUGH. BY WHYTE-MELVILLE.

SHAVING THE SHAGPAT. BY GEORGE MEREDITH.

KITTY. BY MISS BETHAM-EDWARDS. 2 vol.

UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE. By the author of "Desperate Remedies." 1 vol.

"For light, happy touches of life and humour we know of no rustic dialogues to be compared with these but in the earlier and best pages of George Eliot." — *Standard*.

THE MAID OF SKER. By R. D. BLACKMORE.

MARGARET. By Mrs. FRASER TYTLER.

THE THREE CLERKS. By ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

MISS MACKENZIE. By ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

THE KELLYS AND THE O'KELLYS. By ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

THE MACDERMOTS OF BALLYCLORAN. By ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

F. X. BEER
kgl. Hofbuchbinder
in
MÜNCHEN
Lederergasse N: 25.

Betham-Edwards, Matilda

Kitty

Bd.: 2

Berlin 1872 [erschienen] 1873

P.o.angl. 18 m-49

urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb11162271-0